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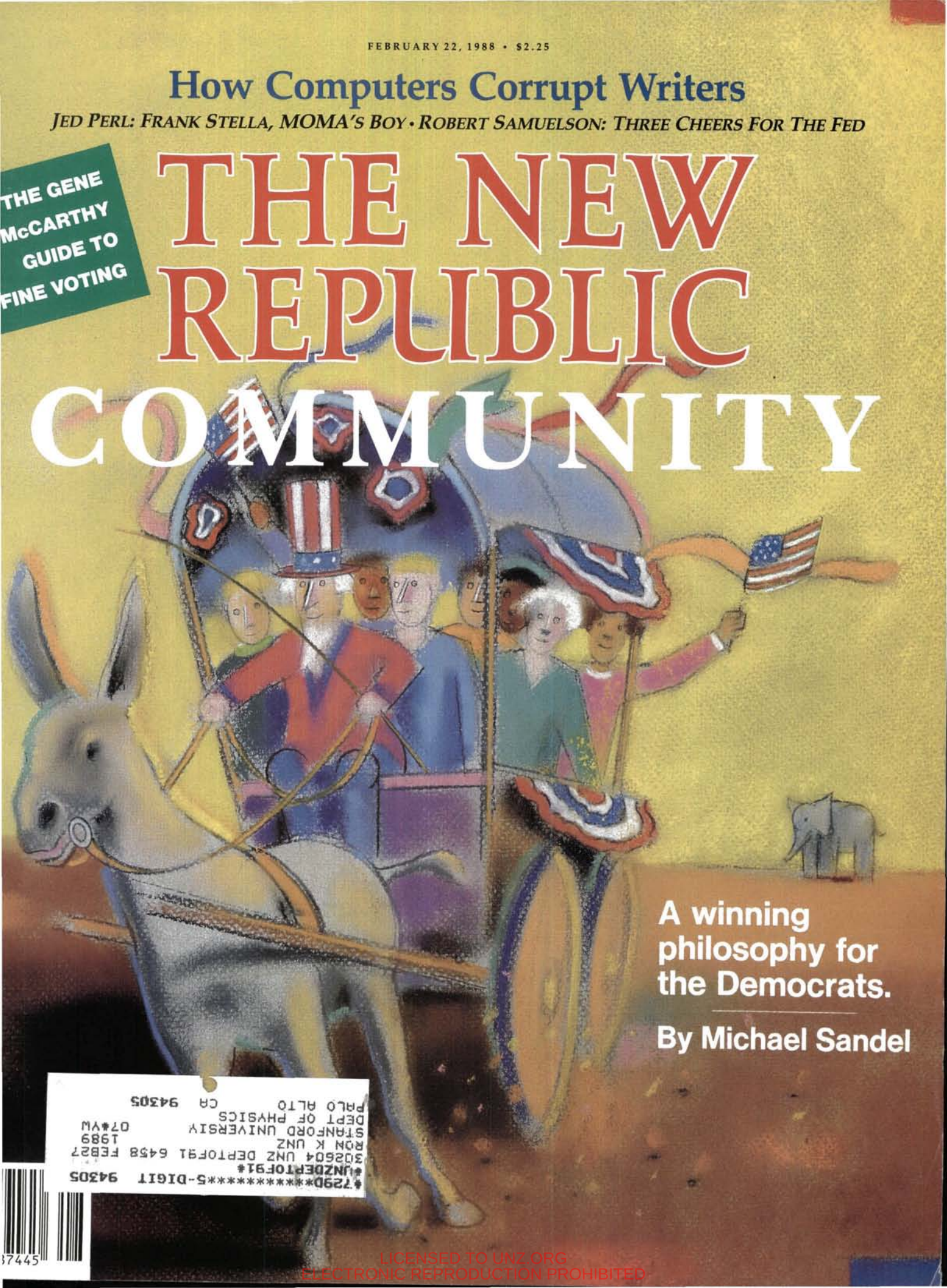

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By Michael Sandel

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FOUNDED 1914 — *A Weekly Journal of Opinion* — ISSUE 3,814

WASHINGTON, D.C. — FEBRUARY 22, 1988

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FROM WASHINGTON

ANOTHER FINE MEESE

It's possible, I suppose, that Attorney General Edwin Meese really didn't read that memo from his friend E. Robert Wallach about the Iraqi pipeline project—the memo that said the project would involve an attempted bribe of the Israeli Labor Party, in apparent violation of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. If Meese did read the memo and failed to report it, he was breaking the law himself. The memo was addressed to him, and was in his files, and Meese did push the project (without ultimate success). But then, attention to detail and an easily aroused suspicion were never the strong suits of the nation's leading criminal justice official.

Wallach is an old friend of Meese's who was content to practice personal injury law in San Francisco until morning arrived in America around 1981. Although he signs his name "e. robert wallach" in some sort of crackpot homage to e.e. cummings, Wallach's own literary genre is the memorandum, not poetry. He was in the habit of bombarding his pal the attorney general with long memos relating to various business interests that had hired him for his administration connections. Some of the early works in Wallach's oeuvre (circa 1981-82)—variations on the theme of federal contracts for the Wedtech Corporation—have already gotten the author indicted. Such are the sufferings of artists throughout the ages.

It's easy enough to imagine the look of delight on Meese's face when informed by his secretary that another epistle from Wallach had arrived. And it would be easy enough to believe that Meese's reaction was a simple, restrained, "Oh, just file that, honey, would you please?" Except for the fact that he seems to have acted on the memos. He arranged a White House meeting that got an Army engine contract for Wedtech over the Army's own objections.

In the case of the Iraqi pipeline (Wallach's client: Bechtel, the giant construction firm), Meese seems to have helped get the project unstalled not once but twice. The Overseas Private Investment Corporation, an agency that insures American investments abroad, wanted assurance that the administration really supported the project. Meese helped to set up another one of those little White House meetings, at which national security adviser Robert McFarlane supplied the assurance. Later, another attempt by OPIC to torpedo the project on legal grounds was defeated through an unusual bureaucratic maneuver in the Justice Department that Wallach engineered and Meese supported.

Still, the memos were long and life is short (*ars longa, vita brevis*), and the eye sometimes does tend to take shortcuts across the pages of even the greatest classics of literature. Even if Meese did read Wallach's missives, he might well have missed what he says are ten little words referring obliquely to the attempted bribe. So let us give him the benefit of the doubt. Thus the pipeline episode joins the long list of cases in which members of the Reagan administration have mounted a successful defense of ignorance.

The president himself has asserted the ignorance defense many times, especially in connection with Iranamok. Vice President Bush's hopes to become Ignoramus-in-Chief may turn on his ability to convince people that he was as far "out of the loop" (his own charming euphemism) as his boss. We know he attended meetings where the connection between (*a*) selling arms to Iran and (*b*) getting Iranian terrorists to release our hostages was drawn in a way sharp enough to penetrate the thickest skull, and where Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and Secretary of State George Shultz protested that this went against everything the administration stood for. But Bush insists he was not present when the key links were drawn and was too dense to put two and two together. What a campaign slogan: "Vote for Bush. He was in the men's room."

Meese also has protested ignorance in connection with Iranamok. He says he knew nothing about the illegal diversion of funds to the *contras* until his investiga-

continued on page 41

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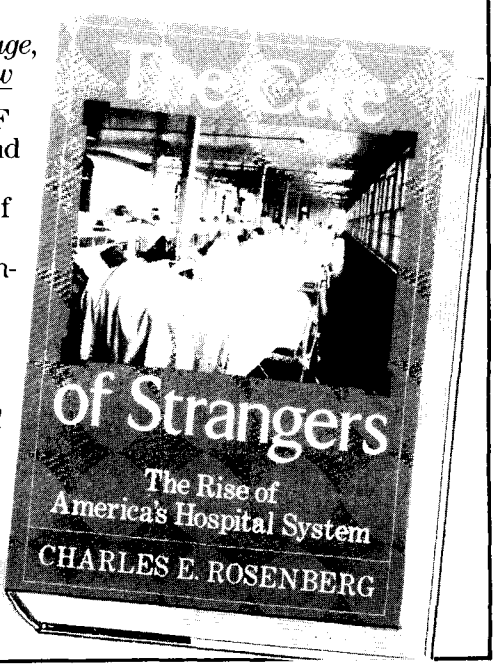

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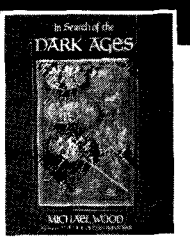

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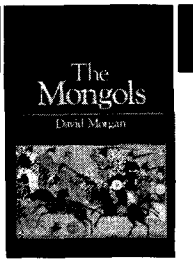

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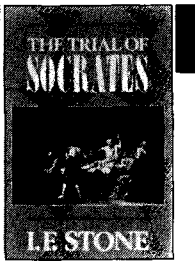

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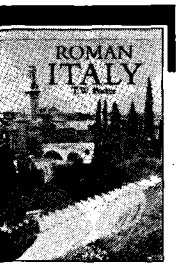

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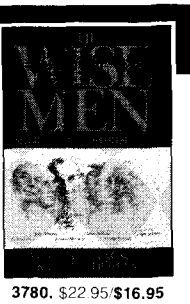

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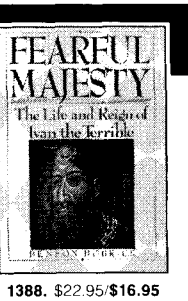

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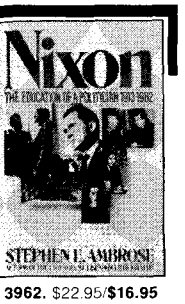

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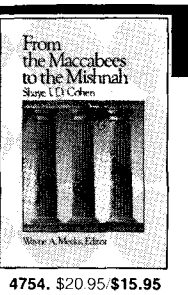

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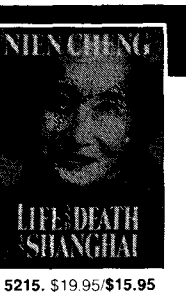

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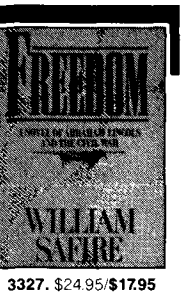

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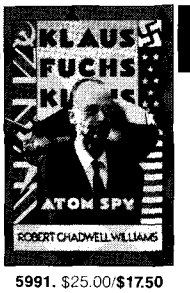

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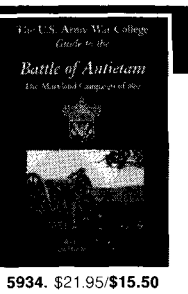

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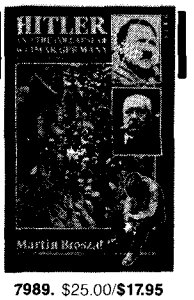

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SELLING SEX

To the editors:
Andrew Sullivan certainly is difficult to please. In his article on eroticism in advertising ("Flogging Underwear," January 18), he criticizes one advertisement for lacking passion, another for using the word "passion." He never explains what the use of bodies as sculptural elements in connection with bold structures has to do with Nazi philosophy, except that any photo he doesn't like gets branded as "fascist." The use of bold colors is reminiscent of "totalitarian propaganda," but the use of black and white is "fascist-realist" and "proto-fascist." Poor Bruce Weber is scorned for being too much like Avedon and Penn, but also for not being enough like them.

But Sullivan goes beyond that. First, he announces that a lot of ads are homoerotic. Fathers, sons, and businessmen (by implication straight), he says, have been supplemented by gay male images. Then he culminates this discussion with examples of ads showing heterosexual rape and child abuse. At best, this is a non sequitur. But I suspect that it is no more than an implicit bigotry that puts same-sex orientation on the same level with rape and child molestation.

ROBERT G. HARVEY
Brooklyn, New York

To the editors:
Advertising's homoeroticism is old hat, but I was taken aback by Andrew Sullivan's "fascist/Aryan" theory. Two of the advertising campaigns he cites are for companies whose founders/owners are Jewish. Now *that* would be a story.

RICHARD FIALA
New York, New York

To the editors:
Andrew Sullivan finds the use of men in ads designed to appeal to men "homoerotic" and boldly calls it "gay advertising." Nonetheless, he also professes to be familiar with a long history of photography in women's magazines. Surely, then, he knows that women's magazines and the ads they carry are designed to appeal to women, and both have traditionally—almost exclusively—featured women. Not only solitary, fully-clothed women, but (especially in European magazines) women posed together and/or in varying degrees of undress. No one accuses *Vogue* of being a lesbian magazine because its photographs are of women and for women. Does Sullivan prefer ads for shaving foam that portray submissive women to those that could claim to help boost men's self-image? The trend seems to be equalizing, the message being that men now should be secure and unself-conscious enough to appreciate their own sensuality, and even be attracted by it, as women always have been.

NORA MCCAULEY
Cambridge, Massachusetts

To the editors:
Certainly a provocative article, and certainly a provocative cover! Unfortunately, you put the mailing label over the best part—his Calvin's. Is this TNR's version of censorship?

CATHERINE SMITH
Brookline, Massachusetts

To the editors:
Andrew Sullivan states with justified dismay that advertising has been "infected with a brazen new elitism, sexism, and objectification of the flesh." Therefore it's ironic that with its raunchy cover for the same issue THE NEW REPUBLIC joins this very same advertising technique! This is definitely *not* what I (and, I surmise, the majority of your subscribers) want. I continue to subscribe to TNR—in spite of its covers, *not* because of them.

ILSE M. STERN
Oakland, California

To the editors:
I have more faith in the tastes of the American people than Andrew Sullivan does. In fact, that Travel Fox ad really cheered me up, although I also go nuts over those glorious diamond ring advertisements TNR sometimes runs in which nobody happens to be naked. Yes, sex sells. So does intimacy. So do fitness, health, and sexual equality. This is progress we're making—with some steps backward thanks to Guess Jeans.

AMY CUNNINGHAM
Washington, D.C.

VERDICT ON NORIEGA

To the editors:
As Tina Rosenberg observes in "The Panama Perplex" (January 25), the torture and decapitation of opposition figure Hugo Spadafora in September 1985 epitomized the brutality of Gen. Antonio Noriega's dictatorship. Recently the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, an arm of the Organization of American States (OAS), formally declared the Panamanian government responsible for the murder. The commission reached its conclusions after hearing evidence presented on behalf of the Spadafora family by the International Human Rights Law Group, a public interest law center. That evidence included eyewitness statements by people who saw the Defense Force detain Spadafora on the afternoon of September 13, 1985—the last time he was seen alive in public. The commission also rejected arguments by the Panamanian government that the "investigation" by Panama's attorney general resolved the matter. As the commission observed, that investigation (which absolved the Defense Force) was riddled with gaps and inconsistencies. In the future when Noriega calls the accusations against him part of an American plot, it would be well to remember that the OAS has formally adjudged his Defense Force to be murderers.

LAURA BOCALANDRO
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VETERAN RESPONSIBILITIES

To the editors:
In "The Department of Fat" (January 4 & 11), regarding possible Cabinet status for the Veterans Administration, TNR misplaces most of the blame for the size of the VA's huge budget. Although the VA nowadays is admittedly more prone to squander funds, there has been no fat in patient care areas for several years. It is the workload and the cost of handling it that keep growing, and that's because Congress will not make the hard decisions that would clearly define and limit eligibility for medical care. Its most recent efforts in this area wound up making the VA responsible for even more care than before. There is currently no legal way for the VA to reduce costs by caring for fewer veterans. And if we try harder to give better care, we only attract more veterans away from the private sector without gaining any additional

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THE NEW REPUBLIC
FEBRUARY 22, 1988

GO AHEAD, MAKE OUR DAY

The National Rifle Association has launched a new advertising campaign. "The new ads are in response to a trend we're seeing in the whole gun control debate," says NRA spokesman Michael Lashbrook. "We're saying, hey, let's get off these fringe issues." By fringe issues he means controversies over the NRA's support for legalized plastic guns that foil metal detectors, submachine guns, and armor-piercing bullets. Lashbrook says, "The core of this issue has always been self-defense. We just wanted to remind people of that."

NRA advertisements used to emphasize the use of guns for hunting and the portrayal of gun owners as normal, healthy Americans. Now nine full-page ads in the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and other newspapers emphasize a different message. One shows a high-heeled shoe with the heel ripped off. The headline says: "He's followed you for two weeks. He'll rape you in two minutes." Another shows a bent and twisted woman's locket. It reads: "Your mother just surprised two burglars who don't like surprises." A third presents a pair of shattered glasses with the caption, "You were beaten to death last night." It ends by asking, "Who cares?"

These advertisements pay lip service to the idea that they're not advocating the ownership of guns, merely demanding the right for those who wish to exercise it. But their actual point is clear enough. The message to women is that they are always vulnerable except when they're armed. The message to men is that they may not be doing all they can to protect their families. The alternative to "a bat, a bodyguard, or a handgun" is "your kids [hearing] your screams." The ads also suggest that if an unarmed person is attacked, the assailant will be coddled by the media, the law, and the political system. Armed, at least you have a fighting chance.

The graphic nature and emotional manipulation of these ads have provoked criticism from gun control organizations and the media. But both sides in the gun debate have resorted to emotional advertising. What about the factual assertion that carrying or keeping a handgun is no more than a sensible precaution in a dangerous world? In several advertisements, the NRA offers statistics to strengthen its case. These deserve closer examination.

The U.S. Department of Justice found that only three percent of rape attempts against armed victims are completed. This is an impressive figure. It implies that carrying a gun can prevent rapes 97 percent of the time. It doesn't say what percentage of rape attempts against unarmed victims are completed. Nor does it say how many people are victimized by guns that were purchased to guard against rape attempts but found other uses. The source of the statistic is a Justice Department report published in 1979 called "Rape Victimization in 26 American Cities." Fewer than 50 victims were interviewed for the report, far fewer than the minimum needed to draw a statistically reliable conclusion. After the advertisement came out, the Justice Department released a statement rebutting the NRA's claim.

What more reliable studies have shown—and what the police say—is that pulling a handgun in a dangerous situation is more likely to end your life than to save it. Since most people aren't trained to handle a gun in such situations, attackers can often easily take the gun away. And even people who are trained have difficulty firing at a

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flesh-and-blood target. That hesitation gives the attacker time to respond, frequently with more violence than he otherwise would have employed.

According to U.S. Department of Justice research [says the NRA], 91 percent of active handgun-carrying felons believe they could get their hands on an illegal, black market gun within "a few days" of release from prison. The idea here is that gun control laws don't keep criminals from buying guns, but they do keep guns away from honest people who wish only to protect themselves. The NRA uses this statistic to argue against waiting periods and background checks for gun buyers, two provisions of a bill now being considered by Congress.

The figure comes from a 1986 Justice Department study in which incarcerated felons were asked where they bought their guns. Again the methodology is dubious. Prison inmates are not reliable survey subjects, and the fact that they believe something, or say they believe it, doesn't make it true. But even if this "belief" is accurate, most guns available on the black market are there precisely because they've been stolen from people who acquired them legally. Handguns in particular are virtually impossible to keep track of. Gun control organizations estimate that there are between 30 million and 40 million handguns in this country. In a recent letter to the *Washington Post*, Senator Daniel Moynihan used a figure of 70 million. In fact, as the FBI admits, no one really knows just how many there are. Waiting periods and background checks would at least give some idea where these guns are going. They would also prevent some spur-of-the-moment killings, such as the one in which a Miami investor bought a gun immediately after the October stock market crash and killed his broker.

Criminal research confirms that Americans thwart 650,000 at-

THE ZEITGEIST CHECKLIST

BY CHARLES PAUL FREUND

This Week		Last Week	Weeks on Chart
1.	PIPE SCREAM	*	7
2.	FLATLAND	—	1
3.	LIVING ROOM BORE	3	13
4.	OFFENSIVE LINE	*	4
5.	GUIDE TO THE COSMO	*	28
6.	BURNING BUSH	1	2
7.	GRIN AND BAYER IT	10	2
8.	LOAN STAR	—	1
9.	NAKED HUNCH	—	1
10.	MY BACK PAGES	—	1

1. PIPE SCREAM

Meese. Since Gorbachev saved Reagan's elastic political skin last December, Reagan associates have resumed their role of surrogate bogeymen. The Meese pipeline story created bigger headlines than Wedtech ever did, and nobody's even seen the already infamous payoff memo. Meese may have gotten stuck being the administration's "man you love to hate," but what is wonderful is how he strains to fill the role.

2. FLATLAND

Iowa. You will not hear about Iowa again for four years—not what its overalled breakfasters think, how its economy is doing, how liberal the *Register* is, not about anything save potential disasters. Yet Iowans narrow the field. It is a quadrennial coverage theme, on slow weeks, that the presidential process is absurd. Fix-it suggestions, however, remain low-grade background noise at best.

3. LIVING ROOM BORE

Nicaragua. Nicaragua's collapsed economy has recently received more attention than the *contras* as a motivation for peace. Although Sandinista mismanagement and corruption have contributed to the hardships, so have U.S. pressures. These stories have occasioned no empathetic response at all. Is the often emotional public willing to accept siege where it rejects war, or is it just the usual indifference to Latins?

4. OFFENSIVE LINE

Sports racism. Received wisdom is that the Super Bowl outcome proved something about black QBs. But this condescending focus takes the Campanis/Snyder line seriously. It is more insidious—and says more about the pathology of race relations—than many of the overt discrimination cases that have lately crowded the papers.

5. GUIDE TO THE COSMO

AIDS. AIDS is building as a story again, but confusion still outweighs panic. The controversial *Cosmo* piece arguing that heterosexual sex hardly ever results in AIDS appeared to strike a note already resonating in the culture. Koop's suggestion that no AIDS cure will ever be found raised few eyebrows—as did the discovery in the U.S. of a second AIDS virus. The big AIDS story is giving i.v. drug users new needles, and that's a drug story.

6. BURNING BUSH

Rather-Bush. The moral of the Rather-Bush story, for Bush, is that the media abhor a type-violation the way nature abhors a vacuum. The line on Bush is that he's still Bertie Wooster, only now striking a false, belligerent pose with his interlocutors. Worse, Bush is now supposed to have a public Jeeves who's getting him through tight spots: Roger Ailes, Nixon's 1968 Svengali. If this takes, Bush won't be able to afford more belligerence.

7. GRIN AND BAYER IT

Health. Who says there's no good news? The key to reducing heart attack risk is reportedly already in your medicine cabinet, and no drug company stands to make a fortune from a patent. The aspirin story just gets more interesting. Nobody seems to understand why it's good for headaches to begin with, and now this.

8. LOAN STAR

John Connally. Connally was never popular with the media; he was typed a wheeler-dealer. Failure has transformed him into a courageous figure, protagonist of a Texas tragedy. Would Connally's story have spun this way a decade ago? Or is the bloodied-but-unbowed angle a subliminal extension of a similar theme involving the nation at large?

9. NAKED HUNCH

Drug legalization. Ubiquitous drug-related crime, murderous turf gang wars, extensive international corruption, and the destruction of entire governments (RIP Colombia) are leading even some social conservatives to ponder the wisdom of drug prohibition. Licensing drugs, many are saying aloud, could exert both legal and social control on their use. Prohibition increasingly appears futile culturally, fatuous politically, and a staggering waste of money.

10. MY BACK PAGES

The new nostalgia. Memories magazine, PBS's series on TV history, the best-selling *Chronicles of the 20th Century*, and the defunct "Our World" series all point to a new kind of boomer nostalgia. Used to be that nostalgia dripped with sentiment, and was essentially social. This stuff is all recycled news and celebrities, the past's greatest hits. As with old Top 40 songs, the memories it evokes are essentially narcissistic.

*Item resurfaces in the Zeitgeist after at least one week's absence.

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tacks each year with privately owned firearms. This figure was calculated by Gary Kleck, a Florida State University criminologist. Kleck didn't actually do any research. Instead, he reinterpreted the results of a seven-year-old survey that asked respondents if they had *ever* used a handgun for self-protection. Since the term "self-protection" was broadly defined, respondents could answer positively if they heard a noise in the basement and checked it out with a gun. The study was based on a sample of about 1,000. Kleck extrapolated to come up with figures for the entire country. It's not clear how he came up with an annual figure when the original poll had no time limit.

By stressing the "preventive" uses of handguns, the NRA avoids confronting the fact that only a tiny percentage of handgun victims are criminals caught in the act of assault or burglary. Some 22,000 people were killed by handguns in 1986. Roughly 12,000 of those deaths were suicides, one statistic the NRA doesn't like to talk about. Another 1,000 deaths were fatal accidents. Then there were 9,345 intentional handgun killings. If the NRA's view of the world were accurate, these deaths would involve either a criminal shooting an innocent victim or an armed potential victim shooting a criminal. Now, anyone who purposely kills with a handgun, except in self-defense, is a criminal by definition. But most are not professional criminals, and many might not be criminals at all if it weren't for the easy availability of guns. According to the FBI, 60 percent of murder victims are related to or acquainted with their killers. Many of these killings were crimes of passion that occurred simply because a handgun was around.

According to data from FBI reports compiled by the National Coalition to Ban Handguns, there were only 193 homicides committed in self-defense in 1986. That means it was roughly 115 times more likely that a handgun would be used in a suicide, murder, or accident than in legitimate self-defense against a criminal. These statistics vary little from year to year.

WE SUPPORT the banning of handgun sales, as do some 40 percent of Americans, according to Gallup. But the NRA still has the influence to keep that from happening. Republicans in particular are susceptible to pressure. At a recent meeting of the Gun Owners of New Hampshire, all six Republican presidential candidates vowed to veto pending gun control legislation. "My idea of gun control is a steady aim," Jack Kemp said.

At the very least, we could make it harder for people to own a handgun. As things stand, gun ownership is regulated by a hodgepodge of laws that vary from state to state. We should apply the same standard to private gun ownership that we do to automobile ownership: by requiring that all gun owners pass a test to get a license, register guns with state bureaus, pay an annual tax on their guns, and carry mandatory insurance for gun-related accidents.

Perhaps it's encouraging that the NRA has been driven to new depths of deception and hysteria. It may be a sign that the gun lobby's long-standing campaign against common sense is getting more desperate.

NOTEBOOK

□ THEY NEVER STOP:

Job market looks dim for office workers in early '88

—*Orange County Register*, January 5

Job Prospects Bright for Office Workers, Study Says

—*Los Angeles Times*, same day

(thanks to Michael A. Fried, Garden Grove, California)

Profit at Recovering BankAmerica

—*New York Times*, January 22

BankAmerica's worst annual loss

—*New York Daily News*, same day

(thanks to Larry Mone, New York, New York)

Cocaine on Wane

—*San Francisco Chronicle*, January 18, page 18

Alas For Parents — Now It's Cocaine

—same paper, same day, same page

(thanks to Robert H. Glidden, Oakland, California)

Going to Europe? Don't hold your breath awaiting bargains

—*Minneapolis Star Tribune*, January 10

Low dollar hasn't killed bargains in Europe

—same paper, same day

□ SEE DICK RUN, CONTINUED: Representative Richard Gephardt made great hay in Iowa denouncing nasty foreigners for keeping out American goods, especially American farm goods. For example, he said in Cedar Rapids the week before the Iowa caucuses: "Rice in Japan—a staple of their diet—costs seven times what it does in the United States, because they won't let any foreign rice in. It's not right. It's not just. It's not fair." Japan's rice policy is deplorable, to be sure. Just as deplorable as America's sugar quotas, which keep out foreign sugar in order to protect the wealth of a tiny group of domestic sugar growers. Michael Wines notes in the *Los Angeles Times* that Gephardt voted twice in the past few years to retain the sugar program. Because of this policy, sugar costs more than three times as much in the United States as it does on the world market. Gephardt says the difference is that Japan bans foreign rice completely, while we merely restrict imported sugar through quotas. This is of little comfort to nations such as the Philippines—nations we are rather anxious to help—that find our market blocked. "We've had a devil of a time keeping our sugar people in business," Gephardt told Wines, explaining his votes. Sure, and the reason has nothing to do

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with foreign trade barriers to American sugar, any more than Japan's trouble keeping its rice producers in business has anything to do with foreign trade barriers to Japanese rice. If Gephardt's belief is that sugar producers must be kept in business whether they can compete fairly or not (and of course they can't), he should quit pretending that all he wants is "a level playing field."

POSTCARD IRAQ

GUNS AND PENCILS

Basra, Iraq

Sometimes the roar of exploding shells is so loud that teachers at Basra University halt their classes while they decide whether to run for makeshift shelter in the sandbagged lobby. One day, when a shell slammed into the roof of a nearby dormitory, a lecturer barely paused. "We continued our class," says law student Moaed El Shawi, waiting in front of a wall of sandbags for the next class to begin. "The teacher said, 'This is just shelling.' "

The war along the frontier, just 15 or so miles from here, is in its eighth year. A professor of English who returned here two-and-a-half years ago after studying in the United States points to where shells have landed among small faculty bungalows. The hard cement blocks of the university—built several years ago as the campus retreated from across the Shatt-al-Arab river—face the road to Faw, the port 50 miles to the south that fell to Iran in 1986 and is now held by 30,000 Iranian troops. Shells fall on the road almost daily. A week before my visit, one of them killed eight people at another campus of the university several miles away.

Through it all, students learn to say what's expected, and what many of them appear to believe. Could the Revolutionary Guards of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini break through the Iraqi lines, storm the shattered downtown, and reach the campus? "Impossible," says El Shawi. "It is further than the stars. They fire shells into the city because they have failed on the front."

In Basra, Iraq's second-largest city and once a thriving oil-rich port, defiance appears more genuine than in Baghdad, 350 miles northwest. Here, where the hulls of ships sunk early in the war wallow in the Shatt-al-Arab before a second line of bunkers manned by Iraqi soldiers, the reality is obvious. President Saddam Hussein, dictatorial, vainglorious, and intolerant, must be preferable to the alternative just a 130mm-cannon's range to the east.

The sight of students crowding the campuses appears to confirm the image of Hussein as an enlightened despot anxious to build up the country through education. The yearning for culture, for class, for a common sense of identity against a highly nationalist foe permeates the campaign to prepare the country's youth for war. "The main aim of Iran is to make Iraq backward, to make Iraq close all schools and universities," says Anwar Mahlud Thiban, president of the National Union of Iraqi Students and Youth, through which the government channels all student activities outside the classrooms. "Our response is to keep them open."

Thiban describes himself as a Ph.D. candidate, but he looks nearly as old as Hussein, who is 51, and admits at the end of our conversation that they have known each other since their childhood. At best the students' organization is an arm for propaganda, churning out magazines, channeling campus activism and running summer camps and workshops. At worst, it's a cover for spying on behalf of Hussein's Ba'athist Party, which dominates it. Indeed, Thiban boasts of the union's founding in 1961 as part of the revolution against the "dictatorial, Communist regime" that overthrew the monarchy in the bloody 1958 coup. Hussein, in self-exile in Syria and Egypt in the early 1960s and a law student in Baghdad after the 1963 coup, saw the union as a device for surrounding himself with dedicated young allies—and for closely watching the nation's youth for signs of dissent. "After the success of the 1968 revolution, the real work of Iraqi students changed from negative resistance to the positive kind," says Thiban.

After a lifetime of student union brainwashing, many young people seem spontaneously supportive of Hussein. Children sing such ditties as "Oh, Father, Take Us to the Front," and profess, on television and radio, in the classroom and at meetings of the Young Pioneers (a socialist Iraqi equivalent of the Boy Scouts), their undying devotion to a man who came to full power only a year before going to war. "We sacrifice our lives for you, for the brave leader we can see at early dawn," says a winsome little girl on television. In high-pitched tones a boy loudly recites one of Hussein's favorite themes: "Iraq, the country of two rivers, the descendant of those great people of Babylon."

Thanks partly to the student union, which monitors primary, elementary, and high schools as well as the weekly "cultural" classes in the university, Iraqis learn the history of a civilization at least 8,000 years old. By the time they are out of grade school they know that society in the region reached its height in Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar, until defeated by Persian hordes in 500 B.C. And every Iraqi child has heard of Qadissiya, the site of a great Persian defeat at Arab hands in 637 A.D. Hussein refers to the conflict with Iran as "The Qadissiya War." The military newspaper is named *Qadissiya*. The government runs a Center for the Rehabilitation of the Qadissiya War Victims, with special programs for handicapped veterans. History, as promulgated by Hussein, must repeat itself.

Not fooled by its own propaganda, however, the government appears painfully aware of the dangers of dissent. Five years ago casualty figures became unavailable. Trucks and cars bearing bodies from the front do not enter cities and towns by daylight. The government forbids public mourning and orders families to keep funerals brief. The soldiers, often fated to serve for the duration of a war without end, are rewarded with extraordinary privileges. They get a week's leave for every three on the front. Offi-

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cers receive Volkswagens made in Brazil every two or three years—and profit by selling them on the black market.

Perhaps as many as 30,000 deserters—most of them believed to be Shiites—hide in the marshes stretching beyond the four-lane highways and the rivers. Independently, bands of Shiite Muslims, a distinct minority in a nation dominated by more prosperous Sunnis, pledge allegiance to Al Dawa (The Call), a rebel group loyal to the teachings of Khomeini, if not the man. On top of this, Kurdish rebels are based in the mountains to the north. Last August about 20 people died when a bomb exploded in Baghdad. In September another 20 were killed in a shoot-out in a provincial capital—at a parade, embarrassingly enough, to which the governor had invited top officials of the ruling Ba'ath Socialist Party as well as foreign diplomats. No group has claimed responsibility for these events, but Al Dawa is widely thought to be responsible.

Finally, since the outbreak of war more than 200,000 Iraqis have died and many more have been wounded, according to Western diplomats in Baghdad. With about a million men now under arms, out of a population of 16 million, Hussein is fully aware that his manpower pool, one-third the size of Iran's, may not be enough. He may have to turn to the campuses for "volunteers" to counter those drummed up by Iran's Revolutionary Guards. That's where the student union's control begins to count. Students can be drafted into the army and sent to the front. When asked if they have any problem with Hussein or his policies, students reflexively say they can't talk, even when there are no teachers or union officials around. Alone, anonymously, they cite draconian penalties for questioning authority. Serious critics can disappear mysteriously. In crackdowns on zealous members of Al Dawa, entire families have vanished. The father of a recent college graduate shuns questions about politics and the penalties for speaking freely. "They will kill you," he says. "Many people have died. We say nothing."

Meanwhile, the propaganda continues. Hussein "supplies all the means to learn more," says a young woman, Bushra Abdurizha, at Baghdad University. "Every year they open new colleges. It is a very good government." Bushra covers her head with a scarf, a reflection of the "new tendency," the common term among Arab intellectuals for the resurgence of militant Islam. Like thousands of other women, she shows her faith in the national cause by doing volunteer work. "I encourage those wounded in war," she says. "I bring them flowers." Over at Mustansiriya University in Baghdad a young woman named Angela Hanna observes that Hussein visits the campus every April 2 to mark the anniversary of the day in 1978 when a girl was killed in a terrorist attack. "We can defend our country not only by guns but by pencils," she says. Eventually, that's all the Iraqis may have left.

DONALD KIRK

Donald Kirk is special projects correspondent for *USA Today*.

CAMPAIGN '88

PULLING THE STRINGS

THE SURPRISE OF Vice President George Bush's campaign for the Republican presidential nomination is not his campaign but Bush himself. Everyone knew that Bush operatives, especially political director Richard Bond, would have states such as Iowa, Michigan, and New Hampshire organized down to the grade school level. And everyone knew that Bush, given his office, would corral most GOP leaders. But who'd have guessed that Bush would perform so memorably in the five debates, four with the other Republican candidates and one with CBS anchorman Dan Rather? Who'd have suspected that Bush would be funny, assertive, confrontational, succinct, and very, very quotable? Practically no one, and that includes me.

Some of the credit for Bush's performance goes to Bush, but a lot more belongs to Roger Ailes, the media consultant and debate coach who joined the Bush campaign last fall. It pains me to admit that a consultant has had such a powerful impact, since I'm convinced the role of consultants is vastly overrated (see "The Myth of Political Consultants," TNR, June 16, 1986). But the effect of Ailes on Bush is unmistakable. Not only have Bush's newfound poise and the one-liners fed to him by Ailes thwarted the other candidates; they also have charged up Bush's supporters. In every debate, except the January 16 session in New Hampshire, Bush has given his backers something to cheer about, some quip to savor. This keeps them energized during the rough patches in the race, particularly now with questions about Iranamok dogging Bush.

Here's a way to measure the impact of Ailes. First, think of Bush's performance in debates in earlier campaigns. He barely outpointed an inexperienced Geraldine Ferraro in 1984, and threw away his gain with a dumb remark afterward about having "kicked a little ass." Then consider what Bush did in the five debates this time, putting aside the one-liners. What's left is an extremely lackluster showing. Absent the quips and the confrontational style, Bush would have been the big loser. And his candidacy would be in deep trouble today. So the only fair conclusion is that Ailes has mattered.

Certainly the other campaign staffs think so. "He's been the single most valuable member of the Bush team without doubt, more valuable than the candidate," says David Keene, a former Bush aide who now advises Senator Robert Dole. True, Keene is eager to belittle Bush by playing up Ailes. Still, his respect for Ailes is genuine. Both Dole and Representative Jack Kemp tried to recruit Ailes, 48, for their campaigns. "He was always our first choice," says Kemp chairman Edward Rollins. Charles Black, Kemp's campaign manager, started talking to Ailes in 1983 about the 1988 race. Donald Devine, a Dole consultant, talked to Ailes off and on for several years. "Clearly Bush has done

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better in the debates than he has in anything in his life," says Devine. "Something did that, and it was coincident with the time Ailes came aboard."

Ailes doesn't claim to remake clients. "I can't change anyone," he writes in his book *You Are The Message: Secrets of the Master Communicators*, published last year. "All I can do is help them identify and bring out their best qualities, the ones that communicate a positive message." A business or political leader who is friendly and at ease in conversation may tighten up in front of a TV camera, Ailes says. "My job becomes one of trying to get him to change back into that warm, comfortable person he was when we were just sitting and chatting."

Coaching by Ailes helped President Reagan get through the second debate with Walter Mondale in 1984. Reagan had bombed in the first encounter, reviving concern about his age and mental agility. In practice sessions, Ailes says, Reagan's advisers were too critical of him, destroying his confidence. At one point, Reagan gave a good answer in practice, but no one congratulated him. Ailes shouted from the back of the auditorium in the Executive Office Building, "Mr. President, that was a terrific answer." Reagan smiled.

Ailes is wrongly credited by *Time* with feeding Reagan his best line. But Ailes's role was pivotal nonetheless. He found that Reagan aides didn't want to mention the age issue. After the last major practice session, Ailes asked, "Mr. President, what are you going to do when they say you're too old for the job?" Reagan was silent for a bit, then said he remembered an old line. Ailes practiced it with him, and in the debate Reagan fired it off, without pause: "I am not going to exploit for political purposes my opponent's youth and inexperience." Even Mondale was forced to crack a smile. But the important thing was that had Reagan not had time to recall and practice the line, he probably wouldn't have come up with it in time to give a quick riposte on national television.

THE AILES theory is that you can win with a sharp line or two, since that's what most of the electorate will see. This is all the more true in pre-primary debates, which are ignored by most voters. What they see are "sound bites" from the debates, episodes of ten or 20 or 30 seconds, on news shows. Ailes coaches his candidates to do well in the sound bites, and Bush has scored heavily. Neither of Bush's chief competitors for the Republican nomination, Dole and Kemp, has.

As front-runner, Bush put off debating his opponents for as long as he could, which heightened the drama of his performance in the first nationally televised debate in Houston on October 28. On that occasion, the guy who was supposed to be hiding from the other candidates suddenly seemed to be in command. But, in truth, all he had was one withering line. Pete du Pont was pestering Bush for not displaying "any vision, any principles, any policies," and the moderator, William F. Buckley Jr., called on Bush to respond. "My friend—Pierre—let me help you on some of this." The line was sharp-edged—du Pont doesn't like to be called "Pierre"—and funny. And Bush went on to say of du Pont's idea of revamping Social Security, "It may be a new idea, but it's a dumb one." Bush's put-down of du Pont made him the star of the sound bites.

The "Pierre" line came from Ailes, and so did the Bush quip in the December 6 debate on NBC. He used an answer to a question on AIDS to zing the Democratic presidential candidates, who had just completed a 30-minute debate segment. "To hear the Democrats wringing their hands about all that's wrong—I'm sorry," Bush said. "I'm depressed. I want to switch over and see 'Jake and the Fatman' on CBS." Bush had never seen the show, but the line worked. Again he dominated the sound bites.

HE DID IT once more in Iowa in the January 8 debate sponsored by the *Des Moines Register*. When James Gannon, the paper's editor, who was moderating the debate, asked about Bush's refusal to tell all he knows about Iranamok, Bush was ready. He accused Gannon of suggesting in his paper that Bush may have known about the diversion of money to the *contras*. Bush demanded that Gannon ask him about that so he could answer it on TV. Gannon didn't. Nor did the other candidates take up Bush on his challenge that they ask him anything at all on Iranamok. The result: another Bush triumph in the sound bites.

In the January 26 square-off with Rather, Bush followed Ailes's advice on two counts. CBS had asked for 60 minutes of interview time from which to distill a portion to be used on the "CBS Evening News." Going along with that would have been asking for trouble, according to Ailes. He advises candidates to avoid "TV programs that are extensively edited. . . . The network will use their most controversial 18 seconds. Those seconds could be remarks out of context or could be the one moment they lose their cool. The primary goal of a program like this is to get ratings." Ailes writes that he likes the morning shows, "which are live or live on tape [and candidates] have a fair shot at saying what they want to say and being sure that it remains intact."

Bush also had several zingers. Hours before the debate, his spokesman, Peter Teeley, had gotten a call from a friend (an ex-CBS employee, Teeley said) who insisted that Rather planned to go after Bush aggressively. Ailes had just the grenade to throw Rather off-stride: a mention of the time last fall when Rather left the set and caused CBS to go black. Bush saved it until he was more than halfway through the nine-minute squabble with Rather. "How would you like it if I judged your career by those seven minutes when you walked off the set?" Rather looked thunderstruck, and he lost his cool completely. Bush used another planned quip about the Iranamok questions as well ("There's nothing new here—I thought this was a news program"), but it was a throwaway line. He didn't need it. He'd already won.

What might have happened to Bush without Ailes literally at his side before the debate? Nothing good, that's for sure. Bush actually did poorly in the Q&A with Rather. He didn't follow the Ailes command to "exercise the law of

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DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

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inverse proportions. The more inflammatory the journalist, the cooler you should be." Bush got testy. His answers were sometimes barely coherent. But so what? When it got overheated, Rather cracked more than Bush did. And Bush and Ailes got the sound bites they wanted.

FRED BARNES

The angst-ridden marriage.

I WANT MY NATO

APPROACHING its 40th anniversary of keeping the peace in Europe, and having just forced the Soviet Union into a historic nuclear arms stand-down, the NATO alliance is in deep angst again. The various blends of glue that have held it together seem to be going runny. Mikhail Gorbachev has diminished the old fear of Soviet aggression, and the mutual respect in which the allies have held each other is drooping. Americans resent the failure of Europe to match U.S. defense spending levels. Germans think that U.S.-Soviet arms control agreements have left them uniquely vulnerable. Anti-nuclear sentiment is rising again, fed as much by conservatives like Ronald Reagan as by bandana-wearing Greens and other leftists.

NATO has come through worse crises than this since its founding in 1949, including Suez in 1956, France's withdrawal in 1966, and Europe's failure to support U.S. resupply of Israel in the 1973 Middle East war. NATO has survived previous East-West thaws too. But each time in the past, the alliance prevailed precisely because the partners wanted it to and were willing to work to that end. There is work going on now too—in the Persian Gulf as well as Europe—but it could use a boost at the NATO summit scheduled for March 1 in Brussels.

The gravest immediate problem is what to do about short-range and battlefield nuclear weapons (known as SRF), which constitute the lower end of NATO's nuclear deterrent, based in Europe. The INF agreement has removed the middle rungs of the deterrent ladder. The top level is America's strategic systems, which Europeans constantly fear the United States would never really use if war occurred.

In West Germany sentiment is building across the political spectrum for talks with the Soviets to reduce short-range systems. The left wants to denuclearize entirely (and also, to avoid seeming "provocative," to deprive the alliance of any conventional capability to counterattack in case of a Warsaw Pact invasion). Some Social Democrats want to get rid of U.S. Lance missiles (which number 100) and Soviet Scuds (700), and leave deterrence to artillery and airplanes. Some conservatives want to eliminate the artillery and modernize the missiles.

The pivotal figure in the debate is Foreign Minister Hans Dietrich Genscher, whose Free Democratic Party perpetually holds the balance of power in German politics. Genscher ("a purely tactical guy," one U.S. official calls him) is militating within the alliance to get negotiations started this year to bring short-range nuclear forces to "equality." German diplomats say it is "absolutely not true" that Genscher has bought or would ever buy the Soviet "third zero" proposal that both East and West dismantle all short-range nuclear weapons, as they have intermediate range. Such an agreement would leave NATO facing a vastly superior East bloc conventional force, with only U.S. airplanes and long-range missiles—plus French and British weapons—left to deter the Soviets.

In spite of German protestations, American officials are convinced that *any* SRF talks will lead quickly to zero—in part because of the INF precedent, because anything more than zero in any category is impossible to verify, and because the Soviet proposal has simple political allure. U.S. officials accuse Genscher and other top German officials of failing to provide intellectual leadership to their countrymen and of pandering to leftist sentiment. "It's getting out of hand," one ranking U.S. official said. "It's dangerous."

It's especially dangerous because if the Germans ever did insist on full withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons, there would certainly be calls for removal of America's 350,000 troops in Europe, who no longer would be protected by on-scene nukes. "That would be the end of the alliance," says Richard Perle, the former defense official, who often uses psychiatric terms to describe the Germans.

If the Germans are "paranoid about confrontation," as Perle alleges, and "schizophrenic about their relations to the East and West," as others claim, there are also problems with America's identity. Ronald Reagan, who once talked casually about winning nuclear wars, now has declared nuclear weapons to be immoral. And at Reykjavik, he very nearly pledged with Gorbachev to give up all nuclear missiles within ten years.

Europe can wait out Reagan, but it cannot be sure what will follow him. Among the Republican candidates for president, George Bush has pledged allegiance to the alliance, but he also has repeated Reagan's sentiments about the immorality of nuclear deterrence (albeit, like Reagan, with a view toward deploying SDI) and declared his intent to be an "arms control president." Bob Dole, seeking to distinguish himself from Bush, is getting ready to declare that he will be more traditional about nuclear and alliance affairs—cautious about giving up strategic weapons and dedicated to modernization of European-based nuclear weapons, not denuclearization.

The Democratic candidates, meanwhile, are almost all determined to reduce defense spending, to demand more spending from the allies, and to reach arms control agreements with the Soviets in every category. They might well be sympathetic to European desires to get rid of short-range weapons. Except for Albert Gore, they are all eager to stop testing new weapons, which would be necessary for modernization of the deterrent.

NATO's defense ministers have agreed in principle that to

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bolster the lower range of deterrence, the alliance should deploy a new generation of nuclear weapons—a longer-range follow-on to the 110-mile Lance and/or a new air-launched missile ("TASM")—but this decision has never been ratified at the political level. German politicians who fought and won the battle to deploy INF now abhor the idea of another fight over Lance.

What's to be done? So far Secretary of State George Shultz has succeeded in preventing Genscher from pushing SRF talks to the top of NATO's agenda. The United States—and most of the other allies—want to pause after the labor of INF, then develop a joint position on conventional weapons to present to the Soviets.

There is some possibility that this position could be ready for discussion at the NATO summit. U.S. officials say that NATO's High Level Arms Control Group is working on a proposal calling on the Soviets to reduce their tank and artillery forces to NATO levels. For tanks, that would involve a reduction from 52,000 to 22,000; for artillery, from 37,000 pieces to 11,000. The Americans want the reductions to apply to all Soviet forces west of the Urals, not only on the Central European front. And some U.S. officials want the Soviets to change their conventional warfare doctrine from an offensive one to a defensive one. "Right now," said an administration official, "they don't train to defend Dresden; they train to take Munich."

The U.S. ambassador to Germany, Richard Burt, has recommended that the NATO summiteers address all the alliance's problems by ordering a full-blown study by "wise men" headed by Britain's Lord Carrington, the outgoing secretary-general of NATO, and including former German chancellor Helmut Schmidt and an American with bipartisan credentials, such as former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger.

Burt's thought is that NATO today needs a counterpart to the 1967 Harmel Report, which came up with the twin strategy of "defense and dialogue" that has governed NATO's behavior toward the East ever since. A Carrington panel would evaluate the current Soviet threat and recommend strategies to deal with it, including arms control and weapons development, at a time when defense budgets are likely to shrink.

The idea of a "wise man" study is opposed by the State Department, which contends that the resulting report might not be accepted by the new administrations to be elected this year in France and the United States. Supporters of Burt's plan say that such a report by well-respected centrist experts would arrive just in time to help these new governments develop the right policies.

If the NATO governments don't want to entrust the future to wise men, it's imperative that they show some wisdom themselves in March by taking action to cure the post-INF blahs. Agreement on a conventional arms control proposal would help, but there also ought to be movement toward reaffirmation of the alliance's solidarity and dedication to the desirability of retaining American nuclear weapons on European soil as an anchor for deterrence.

As a partial morale boost, the allies can consider the good work they've done lately despite nuclear angst. They've managed to cooperate in patrolling the Persian Gulf. France is edging back into NATO by cooperating with Germany. Spain has ousted American F-16s but is remaining in the alliance, while Italy and other countries are offering to take the planes.

What needs to happen at the summit, according to David Abshire, the former U.S. ambassador to NATO, is a heads-of-government decision to "forge a comprehensive strategy to confront all the difficult issues facing the alliance," including nuclear and conventional arms control, modernization, chemical weapons, and especially, improvement of conventional deterrence at reduced cost.

It may be that Mikhail Gorbachev will prove to be all that well-wishers here and in Europe hope for—a leader dedicated to disarmament and harmony, who will eliminate the Soviet military threat from Western Europe and withdraw Soviet forces from Eastern Europe. But all he's done so far is agree to eliminate one class of weapons. After 40 years of success, the allies ought to realize that the way to encourage good behavior on the Soviet side is for NATO to hang together.

MORTON M. KONDRACKE

The Gospel according to Eugene.

THE 15 COMMANDMENTS

THERE IS LITTLE evidence that the increasingly complex and irrelevant procedures of president selection—primaries, debates, articles in the *National Enquirer*, etc.—are likely to become more orderly before the next election. So voters will have to simplify the process for themselves. Here are some suggestions that may be helpful.

Persons in the following categories should be categorically rejected:

1. Governors or former governors, unless they have had experience with the federal government. Their problem is one of overconfidence. They are inclined to believe that they can balance the federal budget if they've balanced a state budget; that they can handle the Pentagon because they have sent out the National Guard to suppress students; that they can handle the IRS because they've reorganized a state highway department.

2. Vice presidents or former vice presidents. They are too often put on the ticket for political reasons rather than for their potential to be president, and, as Senator Paul Laxalt observed, the office is likely to weaken and confuse character. Government and politics would be well served if the vice presidency were eliminated, a proposition that was given serious thought in 1803.

3. Ministers, sons (and daughters) of clergymen, and, worse, "leading lay persons." The religious judgment and

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commitment is fundamentally different from that of the political-secular order. The medieval distinction between the First Estate (religious) and the Second and Third Estates (both secular and civil) was a useful one, anticipating Spengler's observation that in any society the basic struggle is between only two estates, the religious and the civil.

4. Generals and admirals, for obvious reasons: the differences in authority, command, and the use of power in the military, as distinguished from that exercised in civil democratic order.

5. Heads of major corporations, or "CEOs," whose experience of power and its uses is essentially feudal rather than democratic. This is especially true of heads of major automobile companies.

6. Any candidate who makes his announcement in February (ancient civilizations reserved that month for worship of the dead and gods of the underworld), or who does so accompanied by his spouse and children or—worst of all—family dog.

7. Anyone who claims to represent a special demographic/sociological group, otherwise known as a "generation." The logical conclusion of such an argument is claiming a right to govern on the basis of having been conceived during the great Eastern blackout of New York City approximately a generation ago.

8. Any candidate who releases medical reports, unless the candidate is suffering from a physical or psychological disorder that might immediately or seriously affect service in the presidential office. Jimmy Carter's statement in 1976 that he was allergic to beer, cheese, and mold, and that he sometimes suffered from hemorrhoids, was a case of unnecessary, if not indecent, exposure.

9. A candidate is suspect if he or she has wanted the presidency very much and from an early age, say, 12 or 18 years. Anyone under 50 is dubious.

10. Anyone with incipient signs of demagoguery. There are four key signs of this tendency: First, does the candidate reserve the front seats in the economy-class section of an airplane, thereby positioning himself to greet and be seen by passengers boarding in the back, but also in a position to slip through the curtain to work the first-class section and even be invited by airline personnel to move up? Second, does the candidate now bill himself or herself as, say, William (Bill) or Robert (Bob) or Patrick/Patricia (Pat)? Third, does the candidate, known previously as John III or IV, drop the III or IV for the campaign, thus in effect repudiating father, grandfather, and possibly great grandfather? Fourth, is the candidate heavily into physical fitness (e.g., jogging), to the point that he reports his time for the mile or two-mile run, or for longer distances? These actions are marginally acceptable in campaigns for governor, but not for the presidency or even the Senate.

11. A candidate who cries easily and often in public is not necessarily suspect. What brings on the crying? Does the candidate cry out of the inner corner of the eye or the outer corner, or straight down from the center of the lower lid, as Bette Davis did, or do the eyes just well up? It makes a difference.

12. Has the candidate either taken credit for or been credited with strength of character because of a primitive experience, without the candidate's protesting such attribution? Jimmy Carter was given a high mark by *Newsweek* in 1976 because he had used an outdoor toilet, and Senator Edmund Muskie had his character formed and strengthened early in life because he was bathed in a washtub. I have had both of these experiences and have not noticed any discernible effect on my character.

13. Any candidate who "knows the numbers," a reputation carried by Robert McNamara and David Stockman, or of whom it is said that he or she "makes no small mistakes." The danger in both of the above statements is that potential critics, so taken by the numbers known, fail to consider the significance of what is being numbered, or are so intent on watching for small mistakes that the big mistakes are likely to go unchallenged until too late.

14. A candidate should not have survived on artificially supplied oxygen for long periods of time, in either outer space or a submarine, or possibly as a mountain climber or scuba diver. Speed reading should also be given some thought. President Carter reportedly took it up while he was president and reported at one point that his retention rate had improved by 50 percent. He did not report the base from which the improvement had taken place or what was not retained.

15. A presidential candidate should know the difference between the techniques used to drive cattle and hogs. A cattle drive is started very slowly, and is best accompanied by gentle singing (e.g., "Get along, little dogies"). But once the herd is started the pace is slowly and subtly increased, and as they approach the stockyard or corral the cattle are all but stampeded and given no time for thought. This was the favorite, near-exclusive technique used by President Johnson, and was especially evident in his handling of the Vietnam War. Generally recognized as more intelligent than cows, hogs must be panicked into motion. They must be yelled at in Latin (e.g., "Sui, Sui"). Once hogs are started they must be allowed to slow down gradually so that they arrive at the desired point at a slow walk, and are moved to think they knew where they were going all the time. As a rule, the House of Representatives should be subjected to the cattle technique; the Senate to the hog-driving method.

IF ALL of this is too much, the potential voter can follow the more cynical rules for political participation and (1) pay no attention to what a candidate is or has been; (2) pay no attention to what a candidate says he or she will do if it is something that cannot be done; (3) look to what a candidate says he or she will not do if it is something he or she could do (and might do), and is something the voter considers important. Application of this rule would have warranted a vote for Richard Nixon in 1968, if one believed that recognition of China was of paramount importance, and a vote for Ronald Reagan in 1980, if one believed that reductions in nuclear arms, together with a partial nuclear disarmament of Europe, was the pressing issue of the '80s.

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And if the voter is in despair, or near it, follow the advice of the man in the gold breastplate under the old stone cross, as reported by William Butler Yeats, and

Stay at home and drink your beer
And let your neighbor vote.

EUGENE J. MCCARTHY

Eugene J. McCarthy writes frequently for THE NEW REPUBLIC.

Conservatives and the Constitution.

REACTIONARY ACTIVISM

ON JANUARY 22, by a vote of 2-to-1, the Federal Circuit Court in Washington, D.C., ruled that the law authorizing "independent counsels" (or special prosecutors) to deal with executive branch misbehavior is unconstitutional. The law was challenged by lawyers for former Reagan assistant attorney general Theodore Olson, who is under investigation for allegedly conspiring to misinform Congress. The position that special prosecutors are unconstitutional is shared by the Reagan administration, along with former officials currently under investigation, such as Michael Deaver and Oliver North.

The battle over special prosecutors, in fact, is part of an emerging trend among right-wing legal strategists that makes a mockery of claims that the right in general and the Reagan administration in particular believe deeply in "judicial restraint," a chord oft-struck during the Bork-Ginsburg-Kennedy confirmation proceedings. Increasingly, conservative jurisprudence appears to be moving away from restraint and toward conjuring constitutional law doctrines that would authorize judges to overturn federal and state regulatory and social welfare laws established by the Progressives, the New Deal, and the Great Society.

In two particular areas, New Right academics, Reagan administration officials, and judges have begun to move the law in directions that seem calculated to promote this goal of economic conservatism. First, they have shown interest in constraining the power of legislatures, including Congress, and establishing the dominance of the executive branch. Second, they have begun to argue that individual *property* rights should receive greater constitutional protection.

D.C. Circuit Judge Laurence Silberman's broad-scale attack on the independent counsel statute raises the first of these banners, executive branch dominance. Essentially, Silberman holds that special prosecutors violate the constitutional principle of "separation of powers" on two grounds: because a court, rather than the president, appoints the independent counsel; and because the president can only fire the counsel "for cause"—such as serious wrongdoing.

Until January 22 these arguments had uniformly been rejected by the federal courts, for reasons that any consistent devotee of judicial restraint ought to find compelling. The Constitution itself says that while certain principal officers can be appointed only by the president (with the advice and consent of the Senate), "The Congress may by law vest the Appointment of such inferior Officers, as they think proper . . . in the Courts of Law." It has been established since the late 19th century that courts are permitted under this provision to appoint officials who, like independent counsels, are located outside the judicial branch, to perform executive-type functions.

The first canon of construing any legal document—and a basic tenet of "strict constructionist" constitutional jurisprudence—is respect for the "plain meaning" of words. But Silberman had no trouble brushing the principle aside: "Although we certainly sympathize with the notion of seeking the meaning of constitutional provisions first in textual language, we do not think this issue can possibly be resolved by invocation of the plain meaning rule."

Silberman is equally brisk with a second strict constructionist icon—deference to the "original intent" of the Framers. During the late 18th century and for more than a century thereafter, federal prosecutions were frequently handled by court-appointed private lawyers—similar to the modern independent counsel concept—or by justices of the peace who were otherwise members of the judiciary. It seems unlikely that the Framers intended to forbid a practice that was widespread in their own time (a favorite conservative debaters' point when the subject is, say, prayer in school).

One conservative theme echoed in Silberman's opinion is that the executive branch should enjoy an absolute monopoly over all activities that can be classified as "law enforcement." The courts and, more especially, Congress may not interfere with the Executive's discharge of that function—however inadequate or even corrupt it may be in a given case. But the whole point of the special prosecutor law—a law, like all laws, passed by the democratically elected Congress and signed by the democratically elected president—is that an administration cannot reasonably be expected to investigate and prosecute itself, a point borne out by the historical record, certainly including the record of the current regime at Justice.

Silberman's reference to law enforcement as a "core executive" function has broader implications as well. It hints of a resurgence of executive privilege as a judicially enforced barrier against meaningful congressional oversight in other areas such as foreign affairs. Conservatives made precisely such claims for absolute presidential foreign policy power during last summer's debate over the Boland amendment, another law democratically enacted and signed, which forbade aid to the Nicaraguan *contras*.

Silberman's second line of attack on the independent counsel law has more far-reaching implications. This is his rejection of any limits on the president's power to fire a

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prosecutor, once appointed. Silberman's reasoning potentially could invalidate more than a dozen independent regulatory agencies, including the Interstate Commerce Commission (which has operated since 1887), the Federal Communications Commission, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Federal Reserve Board. (Indeed, Olson himself, the subject of the Silberman opinion, is involved as a private attorney in a suit challenging the authority of the Federal Trade Commission on precisely this ground.)

Until recently, the idea that the "separation of powers" theory might justify the Supreme Court in forcing so massive a transformation of government was confined to academic scholars. But such ideas have been gaining legitimacy on the right. In a 1985 speech, Attorney General Edwin Meese asserted: "Federal agencies performing executive functions are themselves properly agents of the executive. They are not 'quasi' this or 'independent' that. . . . Power granted by Congress should be properly understood as power granted to the Executive." Justice Antonin Scalia wrote two years ago, when he was still on the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals: "It is not as obvious today as it seemed in the 1930s that there can be such things as genuinely 'independent' regulatory agencies."

AN EVEN MORE radical attack on liberal regulatory and social welfare programs has been advanced by leading right-wing academics and appears to have found champions in Scalia and Chief Justice William Rehnquist. This ambitious agenda, involving the exhumation of long dead pre-New Deal constitutional theories, was displayed at an October 1987 Federalist Society conference at George Mason University entitled "Constitutional Protections of Economic Activity: How They Promote Individual Freedom." The symposium was funded, perhaps ironically, by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. It featured a keynote address by University of Chicago Professor Richard Epstein, a former colleague there of Scalia. Epstein argued that social welfare programs, and taxes that pay for them, "take" property from some citizens and give it to others without the constitutionally mandated "just compensation." This position, as Epstein cheerily acknowledges, "invalidates much of the 20th-century legislation," including "modern zoning, landmark preservation, and rent-control statutes, . . . collective bargaining, and minimum-wage laws."

Two Supreme Court decisions during the last term seemed to be moving the courts in Epstein's direction. An opinion by Rehnquist dealt with what happens when a government regulation (such as zoning) reduces the value of property so much that it becomes a "taking," and thus requires "just compensation" under the Constitution. The old rule had been that the government was liable for compensation only prospectively. Thus it could gracefully abandon the invalid regulation, but the public treasury would suffer no loss. Rehnquist held that property owners could recover for *past* harm from the regulation, thus creating an inherent and sometimes vast risk of monetary liability any time the government attempts to regulate land use.

In the second case, Scalia held that the state of California had to compensate beachfront property owners for requiring them to provide public access to the beach as a condition of getting a building permit. Previously, a regulation that impaired property values was not considered a "taking" if it met the easy test of being "rationally related" to any plausible government interest or purpose. Scalia wrote that such a regulation must "substantially advance" the state purpose, and that the beach access rule did not. This ruling, obviously, is an invitation for judges to involve themselves in minute details of government policy-making—exactly the kind of "activism" conservatives claim to deplore.

Whatever the ultimate destination of this new Scalia-Rehnquist property rights initiative, their decisions are plainly calculated to invite challenge to as yet undefined classes of regulation and legislation. As Justice John Paul Stevens observed in dissent, they are likely to spark a "litigation explosion" and impose "an unprecedented chilling effect . . . on public officials charged with the responsibility for drafting and implementing regulations designed to protect the environment and the public welfare."

These Supreme Court decisions refining the law of "taking," or even Supreme Court invalidation of the independent counsel statute, might not lead the Court all the way down the road it seems to be started on. But there are powerful political interests urging it forward. The Republicans have controlled the presidency for 16 of the past 20 years, while controlling the Senate for only six of those years and the House of Representatives for none. This gives them a strong practical interest in enhancing executive power at the expense of the legislature. On a theoretical plane, the legal right has long drawn sustenance from Nobel economist James M. Buchanan's "public choice" theory, which holds that democratic legislatures chronically overspend and undermine growth-maximizing profit incentives. In Richard Epstein's typically quotable words, "public choice" theory can be traced to the Founding Fathers: "The greatest abuse known to the Framers was the ceaseless imagination of legislative factions to devise new schemes for the costly and unproductive transfer of wealth and power from one's opponents to one's friends."

THE CONSTITUTIONALITY of the independent counsel law may be the first major issue that Anthony Kennedy faces on the Supreme Court. But in considering other judicial nominees for the remainder of Reagan's term, and beyond that if necessary, the Democratic Senate would do well to consider not only the preservation of civil rights and civil liberties precedents, but the potential for a new conservative activism.

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The Israeli right wakes up.

SHAMIR TACTICS

THERE ARE currently over 600 foreign journalists in Israel covering the activities of an estimated 3,000 troops in the occupied territories. Every stone and every blow has been documented, photographed, and commented on, but very little has been noted about the effect of the past few months on the national psychology of Israel. The mood is one of deep depression—deeper, perhaps, than at any other time in the 23 years I have lived in the country. The riots, the violent reactions to them, the hatred on both sides, the hopelessness of it all, have overshadowed almost every aspect of life. Israelis feel besieged from within, and criticized and isolated from without.

Clearly the status quo is dead. The Palestinian shadow that has lurked in the wings these past 20 years has manifested itself with a vengeance and determination that not even the most pessimistic Israelis had predicted. The trauma is as profound as that of the 1973 Yom Kippur war, though the casualties cannot be compared. The writing had been on the wall, but the country had been too blinded by self-delusion to recognize the inevitable. It has now arrived, and Israel will never be the same.

Common wisdom has it that these riots have made Israel more right wing. "For each stone thrown [Meir] Kahane reaps another hundred votes," wrote an Israeli journalist. The truth, however, is that it is Israel's right wing that has manifested serious doubt about whether Israel can continue to be both occupier and democratic country. It is the right's fundamental positions that have been shattered, not those of the left, which has always predicted catastrophe, and it is in the right wing that one now sees both the cracks of dissent and the beginnings of compromise.

The unthinkable is beginning to happen: key Likud politicians such as Tel Aviv Mayor Shlomo Lahat and Ehud Olmert, a confidant of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, are publicly saying that new realities have made new ideas essential, and that these are worthless unless they contain meaningful concessions to the Palestinians. Deputy Prime Minister David Levy, a man with a sizable constituency in the Herut faction of the Likud (composed mainly of the Sephardi vote that once formed Menachem Begin's political base), has said openly that there is no alternative to political compromise. The prime minister's aides recently had to use all the power at their disposal, including blatant threat, to quell a Herut uprising organized by Moshe Amirav, a Jerusalem Central Committee member demanding radical change in the Herut position.

Until late January Shamir was immovable. He had refused to budge on the international conference, he had refused to recognize the severity of the riots, in defiance of the United States he had refused to rescind the deportation orders issued against nine Palestinians, and he would not criticize Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin's military policies despite the obvious damage they were causing to Israel's international relations. So defiant was Shamir that in a recent column he was referred to as "Mr. Nyet"—a man who only knows how to say "no."

Yet finally it was Shamir, not Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, who grabbed the diplomatic initiative. While Peres, in a tired and unconvincing voice, continued to plead for an international conference that neither the United States nor half of Israel wants, Shamir accepted a formal proposal from the Reagan administration that would commit Israel, by next December, to direct negotiations with the Jordanians and Palestinians on the final status of the territories. Shamir has agreed to full discussions with Jordan by September, under American auspices, on the nature of transitional Palestinian autonomy. In a recent interview with the Associated Press, he further agreed to democratic elections in the West Bank and Gaza and committed Israel to recognizing those Palestinians elected—an unprecedented departure from his long-standing position that there were no Palestinians, let alone a Palestinian electorate.

THUS THE MAN who opposed the peace agreement with Egypt has come to advocate that the Camp David process, leading to a redefinition of the status of the West Bank and Gaza, be telescoped from five years into nine months. His proposals may be tactical, designed to take the wind out of the Palestinians' sails, to relieve American pressure on Israel, or even to improve his internal political position as Israel approaches an election next November. But the Americans have taken him seriously enough to dispatch Philip Habib, known to have special influence with King Hussein, to Jordan along with senior State Department and National Security Council staff. And Egypt's President Hosni Mubarek was impressed enough to say on national television that Shamir was being "flexible." Mubarek also made it clear that although he continued to back Jordan's request for an international conference, he was not opposed to other initiatives—a clear signal that he would support Hussein if the king decided to accept the American proposals.

Without Jordan the process has no hope of success. Unlike previous ill-fated (and halfhearted) attempts to unravel the Israel-Palestinian imbroglio, this time the king has every incentive to cooperate, for Jordan has lost almost as much as Israel in the growing anarchy of the past two months. For three years now Hussein has been systematically building up support in the territories, appointing more West Bankers to his Cabinet and parliament; investing in newspapers and banks; facilitating the export of West Bank and Gazan produce; paying the salaries of all the teachers in the occupied territories; and making available loans for small businesses. None of these measures, however, gave him one iota of control in the streets of either Gaza or the West Bank, where his name was cursed as often and as loudly as

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Israel's in the chants of the crowd.

The growing fundamentalism in Gaza and the unbridled Palestinian nationalism on the West Bank are as much a threat to the Hashemite Kingdom as they are to Israel, perhaps even more so. Hussein also must fear the possibility that Israel, if confronted by a rapidly deteriorating situation, may decide on unilateral action that could leave Jordan in an impossible situation. He is said to fear genuinely that, if pushed to the wall, Israel will not hesitate to expel thousands of Palestinians over the Jordan river. Though most analysts in the West scoff at this suggestion, as do most Israelis, Hussein knows that the possibility of this happening is not totally theoretical. He himself, after all, expelled tens of thousands of Palestinians to Lebanon, and mowed down hundreds more when confronted by similar circumstances in September 1970.

The pitfalls here are clearer than the paths toward progress. Even if Hussein throws himself into attaining a solution based on the American proposals, many fear that what is being offered to the Palestinians is too little too late. Others fear that even the mainstream Palestinian population on the West Bank and in Gaza—the merchants and professionals—who support Hussein in private, will not dare move in defiance of the mood in the streets.

Yet the consequences of inaction are perilous. The Israel Defense Force will undoubtedly find the means to suppress the riots with growing efficiency and less international attention, but they will not cause the symptoms generating the unrest to disappear. If anything they will only deepen the frustration, strengthen the radicals, and accelerate the cycle of violence and counterviolence that is leaving neither victor nor vanquished, but only victims on both sides.

HIRSH GOODMAN

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A public philosophy for American liberalism.

DEMOCRATS AND COMMUNITY

BY MICHAEL J. SANDEL

AS THE CAUCUSES and primaries approach, the Democratic candidates for president have yet to stir the public imagination. This cannot be due to any shortage of ideas. These candidates have offered bushels of proposals—to restore American competitiveness, reduce the budget deficit, reform military spending, improve education, and collect taxes more efficiently. They have even debated the "ideas issue" itself. When Gary Hart re-entered the race brandishing ideas like weapons, his rivals rightly replied that they had ideas too, and had been discussing them all along.

There is nothing wrong with ideas in politics, but something is missing from this campaign that new ideas cannot cure. What the Democrats need is not more ideas but a larger idea, a governing vision. Beyond the policies and proposals, they need a public philosophy.

For half a century, the Democratic Party was sustained by the public philosophy of New Deal liberalism. Democrats and Republicans debated the role of government in the market economy, and the responsibility of the nation for the collective provision of basic needs. The Democrats won that debate, and elected every president but Eisenhower from 1932 to 1964.

In time the Republicans stopped attacking the welfare state and argued instead that they could manage it better. But the New Deal agenda continued to define the terms of debate, and the meaning of liberalism and conservatism. Liberals favored a greater federal role in the social and economic life of the nation, conservatives less.

Between these alternatives flowed the rhythms of American politics. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. has written that American politics moves in cycles, from activism to quietude and back again. Since progress demands passions that cannot last for long, liberalism advances by seasons, punctuated by conservative interludes that set the stage for further reforms.

Thus the complacent Republican '20s gave way to the activism of FDR and Truman, which receded in turn to the languid years of Eisenhower. A time of consolidation prepared the way for renewed political exertions, for Kennedy's call to "get the country moving again," and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. By the end of the '60s, exhausted and divided, the country collapsed into Richard Nixon's awkward embrace.

This account of the political pendulum explains the predominance of the Democratic Party in recent times. Al-

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though it assigns to each party a distinctive vocation—the Democrats reform, the Republicans repose—it casts the Democratic Party as the primary agent of moral and political improvement. And so, for half a century, the Democrats have been. The welfare state took shape under Democratic auspices, and the great issues of the 1960s—civil rights and the Vietnam War—were fought out not between the parties but within the Democratic Party.

If the cycles of American politics hold up, 1988 should be a Democratic year. If the world turns as the conventional wisdom suggests, eight years of Ronald Reagan will have left a country ripe for reform.

BUT THERE IS reason to think that the cycle has stalled, the pattern dissolved. By the 1970s the New Deal agenda had become obsolete. The alternatives it posed lost their capacity to inspire the electorate or animate meaningful debate. Voter turnout steadily declined from the '60s to the '80s, party loyalties eroded, and disillusion with government grew. Meanwhile, politicians groped to articulate frustrations and discontents that the reigning political agenda did not capture. From the left and the right came a politics of protest. In the 1972 primaries, pollsters found to their surprise that many supporters of George Wallace favored George McGovern as their second choice. Despite their ideological differences, both appealed to a tradition of populist protest.

In 1976 Jimmy Carter brought the Southern and progressive strands of populist protest together in a single candidacy. Like Wallace and McGovern, he campaigned as a political outsider, a critic of the federal bureaucracy and the Washington establishment. But Carter's presidency only deepened the discontent he had tapped as a candidate. Four years later another self-described political outsider, Ronald Reagan, ran for president by running against government, and won.

In different ways, both Carter and Reagan spoke to anxieties that the New Deal agenda failed to address. Both sensed a growing fear that, individually and collectively, we are less and less in control of the forces that govern our lives. Despite the extension of rights and entitlements in recent decades, and despite the expansion of the franchise, Americans increasingly find themselves in the grip of impersonal structures of power that defy their understanding and control.

By the 1970s a generation weaned on ever-rising standards of living and unrivaled American power suddenly confronted a world it could not summon or command. A decade of inflation and declining real wages undercut Americans' confidence that we could shape our personal destinies. Meanwhile, events in the world at large symbolized the loss of collective mastery—in Vietnam, a war we could not win, in Iran, a hostage-taking we could not avenge, and in 1987, a stock market crash that even the experts could not explain.

To make matters worse, the flow of power to large-scale institutions coincided with the decline of traditional communities. Families and neighborhoods, cities and towns, religious and ethnic and regional communities were eroded or homogenized, leaving the individual to confront the impersonal forces of the economy and the state without the moral or political resources that intermediate communities.

It is clear by now that Ronald Reagan's presidency has not addressed the worries and longings his candidacy so effectively evoked. For all the talk of "America standing tall," it neither restored our sense of self-mastery nor reversed the erosion of community. The Marines killed in Lebanon, the failed attempt to trade arms for hostages, the Wall Street plunge, and a gaping trade deficit are Reagan-era reminders of a world spinning out of control.

Still, Democrats will not reap the fruits of Reagan's failures until they learn from his success at speaking the language of self-government and community. Oddly enough, a new public philosophy for American liberalism has something to learn from Ronald Reagan's conservative vision.

Political genius is more instinctive than deliberate, especially so in the case of Reagan. His genius was to bring together in a single voice two contending strands in American conservatism. The first is individualistic, libertarian, and laissez-faire, the second communal, traditionalist, and Moral Majoritarian. The first seeks a greater role for markets in public life, the second a greater role for morals.

Individualist conservatives believe people should be free to do as they please so long as they do not harm others. They are the conservatives who talk about "getting government off people's backs." Communal conservatives, by contrast, believe government should affirm moral and religious values. They want to ban abortion, restrict pornography, and restore prayer to public schools. While the first favor a volunteer army in the name of individual liberty, the second favor conscription in hopes of cultivating civic virtue. The first oppose the welfare state as a form of coerced charity; the second favor a welfare state that promotes conservative values.

Reagan managed to affirm both ethics without ever choosing between them. In his capacious conservatism, Milton Friedman met Jerry Falwell, and the two coexisted for a time. But Reagan's political achievement was not simply to make bedfellows of libertarian economists and fundamentalist preachers. It was to draw from conservative ideals a set of themes that spoke to the troubles of the time.

AND HERE LIES the lesson that American liberalism has still to learn: the themes that resonated most deeply came from the second strand, the communal strand of conservative thought. For all Reagan's talk of individual liberty and market solutions, the most potent part of his appeal was his evocation of communal values—of family and neighborhood, religion and patriotism. What Reagan stirred was a yearning for a way of life that seems to be receding in recent times—a common life of larger meanings, on a smaller, less impersonal scale than the nation-state provides.

To their political misfortune, Democrats in recent years have not spoken convincingly about self-government and community. More than a matter of rhetoric, the reasons run

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deep in liberal political theory. For, unlike conservatism, contemporary liberalism lacks a second voice, or communal strand. Its predominant impulse is individualistic.

Like laissez-faire conservatives, liberals believe that government should be neutral on moral and religious questions. Rather than affirm in law a particular vision of the good life, liberals would leave individuals free to choose their values for themselves. They believe government should protect people's rights, not promote civic virtue. It should offer a framework of rights, neutral among ends, within which its citizens may pursue whatever values they happen to have.

THOUGH THEY SHARE the ideal of a neutral state that protects individual rights, individualist conservatives and liberals disagree about *what* rights are fundamental, and about what political arrangements the ideal of neutrality requires. Conservatives emphasize private property rights, and claim that freedom of choice is most fully realized in an unfettered market economy. Liberals reply that genuine freedom requires certain social and economic prerequisites, and so argue for rights to welfare, education, employment, housing, health care, and the like.

And so, for half a century, the argument has gone. Locked in battle with laissez-faire conservatives, liberals defended the welfare state in the individualistic language of rights and entitlements. For example, the Social Security system was set up from the start to resemble a private insurance scheme rather than a social welfare program, funded by payroll "contributions," not general tax revenues. FDR rightly thought this would assure its political survival.

Compared with the social democracies of Europe, the American welfare state draws less on notions of communal obligation and social solidarity and more on notions of individual rights. Given the individualism of American political culture, this may have been the only way to win broad support for the public provision of basic human goods.

But political considerations aside, liberals are troubled in principle by strong notions of self-government and community. If government is not neutral, they ask, then what is to prevent an intolerant majority from imposing its values on those who disagree? Didn't the struggle for civil rights show that "local control" can be a code word for racism, that "community" is the first refuge of prejudice and intolerance? And hasn't the rise of the religious right taught the danger of mixing morality and politics?

When Democrats do speak of community, they usually mean the national community. FDR argued for "extending to our national life, the old principle of the local community," and encouraged Americans to think of themselves as "neighbors" bound in national community. More recently, Democrats have used the family as a metaphor for the ties of national citizenship. Urging the Great Society, Lyndon Johnson saw "America as a family, its people bound together by common ties of confidence and affection." In 1984 Walter Mondale and Mario Cuomo also compared the nation to a family. As Mondale proclaimed, "Let us be a community, a family where we care for each other, knit together by a band of love."

But the yearning for community can no longer be satisfied by depicting the nation as a family or a neighborhood. The metaphor is by now too strained to carry conviction. The nation is too vast to sustain more than a minimal commonality, too distant to permit more than occasional moments of participation.

Local attachments can serve self-government by engaging citizens in a common life beyond their private pursuits, and by cultivating the habit of attending to public things. They can enable citizens, in Tocqueville's phrase, to "practice the art of government in the small sphere within their reach."

Ideally at least, the reach extends as the sphere expands. Civic capacities first awakened in neighborhoods and town halls, churches and synagogues, trade unions and social movements, find national expression. For example, the civic education and social solidarity cultivated in the black Baptist churches of the South were a crucial prerequisite for the civil rights movement that ultimately unfolded on a national scale. What began as a bus boycott in Montgomery later became a general challenge to segregation in the South, which led in turn to a national campaign for equal citizenship and the right to vote. But more than a means of winning the vote, the movement itself was a moment of self-government, an instance of empowerment. It offered an example of the kind of civic engagement that can flow from local attachments and communal ties.

FROM THE New Deal to the Great Society, the individualistic ethic of rights and entitlements offered an energizing, progressive force. But by the 1970s it had lost its capacity to inspire. Lacking a communal sensibility, liberals missed the mood of the discontent. They did not understand how people could be more entitled but less empowered at the same time.

The anxieties of the age concern the erosion of those communities intermediate between the individual and the nation, from families and neighborhoods to cities and towns to communities defined by religious or ethnic or cultural traditions. American democracy has long relied on communities like these to cultivate a public spirit that the nation alone cannot command. Self-government requires community, for people aspire to control their destiny not only as individuals, but as participants in a common life with which they can identify.

But the public philosophy of rights and entitlements left Democrats suspicious of intermediate communities. From the New Deal to the civil rights movement to the Great Society, the liberal project was to use the federal government to vindicate individual rights that local communities had failed to protect. Unable to fulfill the longing for self-government and community, Democrats allowed Ronald Reagan and the religious right to capture these aspirations and bend them to conservative purposes.

This abdication was politically costly, for as Reagan has shown, the communal dimension of politics is too potent

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to ignore. But it was also philosophically unnecessary, for there is nothing intrinsically conservative about family or neighborhood or community or religion. To the contrary, under modern conditions, traditional values cannot be vindicated by conservative policies. This can be seen in Reagan's failure to govern by the vision he evoked.

Reagan's proposed solution to the erosion of self-government was to shift power from the federal government to states and localities—to cut federal domestic spending, to decentralize and deregulate. A revitalized federal system would restore people's control over their lives by locating power closer to home. Meanwhile, a less activist federal judiciary would strengthen traditional values by allowing communities to legislate morality in the areas of abortion, pornography, homosexuality, and school prayer.

But this approach was bound to fail, because it ignored the conditions that led to the growth of federal power in the first place, including the growth of corporate power on a national, and now international, scale.

In its origins, federalism was designed to promote self-government by dispersing political power. But this arrangement presupposed the decentralized economy prevailing at the time. As national markets and large-scale enterprise grew, the political forms of the early republic became inadequate to self-government. Since the turn of the century, the concentration of political power has been a response to the concentration of economic power, an attempt to preserve democratic control.

Decentralizing government without decentralizing the economy, as Reagan proposed, is only half a federalism. And from the standpoint of self-government, half a federalism is worse than none. Leaving local communities to the mercy of corporate decisions made in distant places does not empower them; if anything it diminishes their ability to shape their destiny.

For similar reasons, conservative policies cannot answer the aspiration for community. The greatest corrosive of traditional values are not liberal judges but features of the modern economy that conservatives ignore. These include the unrestrained mobility of capital, with its disruptive effects on neighborhoods, cities, and towns; the concentration of power in large corporations unaccountable to the communities they serve; and an inflexible workplace that forces working men and women to choose between advancing their careers and caring for their children.

IN THE END, Reagan's presidency was an evocative success and a practical failure. In both respects, it offers insights that can inform a public philosophy for American liberalism.

First, liberalism must learn the language of self-government and community. It needs a vision of self-government that goes beyond voting rights, important though they are. And it needs a vision of community that embraces the rich array of civic resources intermediate between the individual and the nation.

Second, no amount of exhortation can rejuvenate communities unless people identify with them and have reason to participate in them. So Democrats need a revitalized federalism of their own, and should begin to debate the political responsibilities best suited to local control. A Democratic theory of federalism might begin by defining the basic rights of national citizenship, and seek ways, consistent with those rights, of giving local communities a greater role in the decisions that govern their lives. It might ask, for example, how to enhance local control of schools consistent with nationally assured rights to racial equality and a decent education for all citizens.

Third, Democrats must acknowledge, as Republicans do not, that any meaningful devolution of political power requires reform in the structure of the modern economy. They need policies to deal with the unprecedented mobility of capital, the unaccountable power of large corporations, and the adversarial relations of labor and management. A public philosophy that put self-government first would focus less on macroeconomic issues such as budget deficits and tax rates and more on questions of economic structure. And it would address these questions not only from the standpoint of maximizing GNP, but also from that of building communities capable of self-government on a manageable scale.

In this respect, it would recall an older debate in the progressive tradition, a debate about the economic arrangements most amenable to democratic government. Some New Dealers favored national economic planning as a way of preserving democracy in the face of economic power, others anti-trust policy and economic decentralization. Earlier in the century, the New Nationalism of Theodore Roosevelt opposed the New Freedom of Woodrow Wilson. Despite their differences, the participants in those debates understood that economic policy was not only about consumption but also about self-government. Democrats today would do well to recover that insight of their progressive forebears.

FINALLY, Democrats should overcome the impulse to banish moral and religious discourse from public life. They should reject the idea that government can be neutral. A public life empty of moral meanings and shared ideals does not secure freedom but offers an open invitation to intolerance. As the Moral Majority has shown, a politics whose moral resources are diminished with disuse lies vulnerable to those who would impose narrow moralisms. Fundamentalists rush in where liberals fear to tread. The answer for liberals is not to flee moral arguments but to engage them. In any case, liberals have long been making moral arguments, often explicitly so. The civil rights movement "legislated morality," and drew without apology on religious themes.

In recent years liberalism has faltered because of its failure to argue for a vision of the common good. This has conceded to conservatives the most potent resources of American politics. A public philosophy of self-government and community would reclaim those resources for liberal purposes, and enable Democrats to resume their career as the party of moral and political progress. □

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STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Under the Gun

Au Revoir Les Enfants (Goodbye, Children)
(Orion Classics)

Le Caviar Rouge
(Galaxy International)

Louis Malle keeps trying to set up shop as a front-rank director. If he doesn't make it in one neighborhood, he hangs out his shingle in another. Some of his neighborhoods have been: the New Wave (*The Lovers*), documentary (*Phantom India*), nostalgic Americana (*Atlantic City*), "meaningful" erotica (*Murmur of the Heart, Pretty Baby*), German-occupied France (*Lacombe Lucien*). Other directors have wandered around in subject and place, conveying a sense of curiosity and growth (Ford, Huston, Welles); with Malle, the feeling conveyed is less adventure than adventurism, a need to move on because he can't really dig in.

Now, after *My Dinner with André*, a modest artistic success because Malle directed modestly, after *Crackers*, a disastrous American comedy, Malle returns to a milieu he hasn't visited since 1974 with *Lacombe Lucien*—occupied France; and he makes a better film than he did the last time he was in this territory. *Au Revoir Les Enfants (Goodbye, Children)*, as he tells us in a brief, spoken epilogue, is autobiographical, an experience that has been pressing on his mind since he was a schoolboy in 1943-44.

Malle (he gives himself another name in the film) was 11, at a Catholic boarding school near Fontainebleau. One day a new boy, called Bonnet, is brought in by the priest who heads the school. The new boy undergoes the usual hazings and cruelties through which children vent their resentment of their elders on their peers. It's soon clear that Bonnet is temperamentally withdrawn, somewhat brighter than the others, and closemouthed about his family background. We sense the truth about him fairly quickly, because of the period and the occasional appearances of German troops and French-Nazi militia; but it's quite right that we should sense it before Bonnet's companions, first, because they are children and second, because they are engulfed in the circumstance and we are observing it.

At last, acting on a tip from a kitchen employee, a Gestapo agent appears, hunting out the Jewish boys hidden in the school. In Malle's class occurs the event that, understandably, he has never been able to forget. The agent asks the Jewish boy to reveal himself. Malle, who has some time before learned Bonnet's real name (Kippelstein), inadvertently glances at the Jewish boy. The Gestapo man pounces on Bonnet. Then he finds two other Jewish boys elsewhere in the school and takes them off along with the priest-principal.

Bonnet forgives Malle before he leaves, saying that he would have been discovered anyway. But Malle hasn't forgiven himself. He tells us that the destination of the arrested boys was Auschwitz.

Unlike *Lacombe Lucien*, the new film has no heavy touches to enlist our sympathies. (It has one resemblance to the earlier film: the Gestapo's informant is a loutish youth, a kitchen helper who is discharged and gets his revenge by informing the Germans. Also some shots are reminiscent of Jean Vigo's *Zéro de conduite*; but how could they be avoided in a film set in a French boarding school for boys?) Still, with no sins of commission, *Au Revoir Les Enfants* falters on the side of omission. It never evokes much more than what can be called the inherent emotion of its subject. No film about people under the Nazis, let alone children, let alone Jewish children, can be devoid of tensions. But Malle doesn't go much beyond or beneath the given tensions: on the contrary, he seems to rely on them to establish and maintain his film.

What was so deeply scored in his memory would, he apparently believed, carry its own weight. This resulted in a restraint on Malle's part that is unusual and welcome, but it also resulted in—harsh word though it is—superficiality. The roles of "Malle" and Bonnet are not well or deeply developed. Besides, the two young actors are neither talented nor appealing, and Malle shows no special gifts in handling children. The boys are never false, but they never become more than stock figures: the safe boy who doesn't mean to betray, the Jewish boy who is slowly but surely doomed.

The boarding school setting forces an unfair comparison. If the life span of Vigo had been different and he had been through the experience of the young Malle, the result would likely have been a film that went beyond a lucid chronicle of the facts, ghastly as they were, to a bitter poem of ingrained cruelty.

Another Frenchman, Robert Hossein, is a very busy actor-director-writer, though little of his work reaches us. His latest, *Le Caviar Rouge*, was adapted by himself and Frédéric Dard from a novel they wrote. Hossein directed and played the leading male role. His wife, Candice Patou, plays opposite him.

The only other part of consequence is played by Ivan Desny, a figure familiar

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Broadcast News. The dialogue bubbles, the acting is deft. They give this comedy about TV newscasters a promise of depth it doesn't have; but it *is* entertaining. (Reviewed 2/1/88)

The Dead. Anjelica Huston's performance is her late father's last gift to us. The film as a whole, however, shows that good intentions are not enough: Joyce's masterpiece cannot be transmuted. (12/21/87)

House of Games. David Mamet wrote and directed this seemingly realistic but really abstract drama about the place of deceit in our world and in ourselves. Excellent. (11/16/87)

Housekeeping. Extraordinary acting, writing, directing in this seemingly gentle but basically mysterious domestic comedy. Two orphaned young sisters and their eccentric aunt in a Northwest town are haunted by the spirit of the frontier. (1/18/88)

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in French and German films since *Lola Montes* (1955). Concentration on these three characters—on only Hossein and Patou through most of the film—gives *Le Caviar Rouge*, in its shape, the sense of enclosure that pervades its story.

Hossein directs cleanly, economically, if without anything like a unique style. The opening shot—the place is Geneva—is of a man in a telephone booth speaking Russian. Then the camera slowly does an almost complete circle over the boats and the lake and the walkways to the street and to a hotel where Hossein is waiting on the sidewalk for a taxi. The panning shot establishes locale, atmosphere, distance-and-connection between the two men. That's skill.

Hossein is a KGB agent, visiting Geneva. Patou, resident in Geneva, is a former KGB agent and his former lover. Desny is a high KGB official who badly needs to find out whether it's Hossein or Patou who knows certain information. He sets up a meeting between Hossein and Patou in a villa, a former Russian consulate, outside Geneva. He tells them that he must learn which of them has the facts. He makes clear that the informed person will be liquidated. Hossein or Patou will have to get the other to confess. Desny then leaves the two ex-lovers in this handsome house to sweat it out.

It's hard to believe that the suspected pair wouldn't have guessed from the start that a hidden TV camera and microphone were watching and listening; and the last sequence shows a disregard of probabilities unlikely in KGB people. But most of the picture, despite a couple of misty flashbacks, is good high-pressure cat-and-mousing, the man and the woman lying and telling the truth to each other, each trying to indict the other. And all this goes on within the framework of their previous personal relationship, which, it turns out, is not dead.

If the script were watertight, this would be a neat "close-up" thriller. Even with its fissures, the film—sustained by three high-class performances—does a little of what many thrillers attempt and fumble: it opens areas of moral and psychological ambiguity.

ROBERT BRUSTEIN ON THEATER

The Definitive Production

The generative impulse of classical theater in our time is still the deconstruction of sacred texts by conceptual directors. And because "deconstruction"—as an assonant noun if not as a methodology—is so uncomfortably close to "destruction" and "desecration," purists continue to be incensed by what they consider the ego trips of vandalizing barbarians. But classical theater can be deformed by excessive piety as much as by irreverence or disrespect, and conceptual directors at least have had the advantage of bringing fresh eyes to their interpretations. You may be pained by a really harebrained textual reworking, but it leaves a permanent scar only if you subscribe to the idea of a "definitive" production.

The specialness of the theater—the poignancy of the theater too, alas—is that it is transitory. Culture is a series of echoes and responses, and a "desecrated" classical text can always be reproduced again on stage in a version closer to the purist's heart. Theater, to use Jonathan Miller's useful terms, is more allographic than autographic, meaning that texts develop fullness of being only through the continuing intervention of many collective minds.

Purists won't be happy with either of the productions under review, and my own feelings toward them are far from undivided. Neither can be called "definitive," but that's not the reason. The more I reflect on theater, the more I'm convinced that "definitive" production is only a trick of memory, reinforced by a stubborn nostalgia. Anyone who's seen Olivier's *Uncle Vanya* on cable recently—once considered the definitive English-language version of that play—has witnessed a dry antique gone moldy with age. Oddly enough, it's usually the most provocative production of one generation that becomes the definitive production of the next, which was the paradoxical fate of Peter Brook's athletic *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Directors have been staging their own *Midsummer Night's Dreams* ever since, in an effort to claim the play for other visions, other generations. Like *Hamlet*, it reflects the form and pressure of an age. After Brook rescued it from gossamer and stardust, Alvin Epstein made it a locus of combat and contention in medieval Europe, James Lapine restored it to the bosom of nature in Central Park, Liviu Ciulei explored its feminist implications in an abstract China-red surround—and now A. J. Antoon (in a production staged at the New York Shakespeare Festival Public Theater) has invoked its magical and supernatural properties in a multiracial South American country.

Abetted by his designers Andrew Jackness (sets) and Frank Krenz (costumes), Antoon has located the play in the Bahia province of Brazil: the European colonialists (courtiers) lounge in white suits and long dresses against pink, beige, and aqua terra-cotta slats; the forest people (fairies) cavort in a steaming jungle, populated with native women carrying baskets on their heads, half-caste tom-tom players, and an amply endowed voodoo mama practicing Macumba rituals with a whisk and an effigy doll. An ecstatic chorus performs sinuous dances, including the samba, to the accompaniment of Michael Ward's flute, marimba, and percussion rhythms; Oberon's magic flower becomes a hallucinatory drug provoking manic visions. To accommodate this hemispheric switch, Antoon has excised many (oddly not all) references to the Greek city-states, and altered the text wherever it makes mention of "fairies" ("women away" not "fairies away," the "very kingdom" instead of the "fairy kingdom," and so on). What he has substituted for sprites and spirits are black priests and priestesses of the Umbanda cult, practicing their dark arts through what a program note calls "hypnotic trances, spells, and spirit possession, using drum rhythms, dances, chants, magical herbs, and cigar smoke to summon up desired spirits."

It is an appealing enough concept, responsible for a lot of local color and smoky atmosphere—but it is essentially cosmetic. Shifting classical texts in place and time can be illuminating. The danger is becoming too easily satisfied with altering the environmental surface of the play, letting visual analogies usurp the effort to penetrate character or to enliven theme. To be sure, *A Midsummer*

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Night's Dream is hardly Shakespeare's most profound work, and it lends itself to a variety of approaches. But this one seems more like an attractive pageant than an original reworking, and the performances sometimes lack concision and amplitude.

I liked most of the lovers, though, especially Elizabeth McGovern's tall, leggy, red-haired Helena; and Carl Lumbly is an athletic Oberon matched well against Lorraine Toussaint's powerful Titania, levitating in her bower. As for the rustics—Athenian mechanicals transformed into Brazilian working stiffs—they are delightful in their merry and tragical, tedious and brief interlude (sounds like a fair description of Beckettian postmodernism, no?)—particularly F. Murray Abraham as a smug but curiously unhammy Bottom, squeezing Thisby's lips and getting his pants pulled up his crotch in retaliation.

BACK TO Peter Brook, who started all this, and who has now remounted his Paris production of *The Cherry Orchard* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music Majestic Theater with a mostly American cast. This piece has been widely celebrated (along with *The Mahabharata*) as a formal breakthrough. But like that protracted Hindu marathon, Brook's Chekhov must have suffered a sea change during its ocean voyage; I found it a singularly colorless ordeal. No doubt my response is influenced by having had to sit for two-and-a-half intermissionless hours in those padded benches with which the Majestic (otherwise a marvelous theater) has been uncomfortably equipped. Perhaps the puritanical Brook wants his affluent BAM audiences to share the same hardships as his audiences in Iran and Africa. Still, his production scheme for *The Cherry Orchard* is equally Spartan. We may sit on benches, but the cast usually sits on the floor, like Turkish beys at supper, protected from lumbago only by the warp and woof of a Persian carpet.

This is Chekhov without walls, and its one original feature is the way it abstracts space by minimizing furniture and props. The lovely Persian carpets—the central one bleached and aged as if by Clorox—are the central visual images. They are the only images, in fact, apart from a sheet-draped armchair, some fabric-covered screens, and a bookcase. Brook has had the admirable idea of rescuing Chekhov from all those overstuffed, overdecorated drawing rooms inherited from Stanislavskian realism, and letting the audience focus on language and action. Stripped and simplified, and offered in a serviceable translation by Elisaveta Lavrova, this *Cherry Orchard* nevertheless often seems as heavy and upholstered as anything produced at the Moscow Art Theater, and almost as lacking in surprise.

THE PRODUCTION is clean enough, but it is also denatured. Occasionally Chekhov's unheard music comes through sweetly, poignantly. Usually the stage is full of familiar sounds, pedestrian melodies. And why is this music so penumbral? Chekhov, disputing Stanislavsky's morbid readings, called the play "a comedy—in places, even a farce." But the buffoons of the play—and Yepikhodov, Dunyasha, Pishchik, Lopakhin, even Trofimov, all have their buffoonish sides—don't reveal much capacity for comedy; and without some lightness of spirit the play seems overly somber. Brook is perfectly aware of the comic nature of *The Cherry Orchard*; he alludes to it in a program note. But his characters lounge around the stage in a nerveless state, sometimes even listening to the sound of gypsy violins—all that patented Slavic mood machinery that alienated audiences from Chekhov for decades.

Brook is a daring director with a high intelligence. What accounts for the flatness of this interpretation? Well, by having us concentrate on language and action, he also makes us concentrate on acting, and the acting is plagued by serious casting errors, not to mention the director's inability to coax consistently textured work from a majority of his company. Writing the word "company," I realize that its absence is a root problem too. The actors fail to create a unified world. It's not just the international mix (Lyubov is English, Gaev Swedish, Yepikhodov Czech, the rest American, and all with pronounced—in the case of Yepikhodov, impenetrable—accents). It's the pickup nature of the cast. In the parts of Anya and Dunyasha, Brook has cast the offspring of two warring writers—Rebecca Miller (daughter of Arthur) and Kate Mailer (daughter of Norman). Although Miller has a gentle, limpid quality that ultimately makes you forget her inexperience, it is harder to forget that she and the less effective Mailer are celebrity children who may owe their parts to qualities other than talent.

Mailer's bland Dunyasha, in fact, seems even paler when compared with Meryl Streep's languid, self-dramatizing ninny in the considerably more radical Andrei Serban production some years back. Stephanie Roth is much too sleek for the nunlike Varya, played by Serban's Priscilla Smith with exactly the right repressed ill temper. Nor is Natasha Parry's curiously stagy Lyubov—performed in the imperious manner of British grand dames—any match for the gyrating melancholia of Irene Worth in the Serban version. I saw Mike Nussbaum do an infinitely funnier, seedier, more hangdog interpretation of Pishchik in the David Mamet/Gregory Mosher Goodman Theater production than the elegant gentleman he is playing in Brooklyn.

And although David Pierce's Yasha (looking like the young Strindberg), Roberts Blossom's Firs (looking like the old Mr. Dooley), and Linda Hunt's Charlotta (looking like the ageless Aunt Dan) are expertly and confidently enacted, you don't find yourself arguing with any interpretation as you might when startled into a new appreciation of a familiar role (perhaps you might argue over Gaev's contempt for Lopakhin being totally directed at Yasha). As for Brian Dennehy's limber, relaxed Lopakhin, it is more a cinematic throwaway than a stage characterization—a demonstration that a big man can have physical grace and charm.

Without an attitude toward Lopakhin, *The Cherry Orchard* has no point of view, and I'm afraid the most disappointing thing to be said about this production is that it provokes no argument. Chekhov didn't take sides regarding the dispossession of his cultured aristocratic idlers by a middle-class developer, and he never moralized about the way a beautiful but useless garden spot was being torn up to make room for condos. But that's not because he was neutral. He saw both the sadness and the inevitability of progress, just as he saw that the dispossessor Lopakhin, whose behavior is that of a villain from mortgage melodrama, was basically a sensitive and hardworking man. Brook's *Cherry Orchard*, however, *is* neutral, and that's why we end up feeling neutral about the play and the characters. For all the carpets, despite the lack of walls, regardless of the omitted props, one feels the production straining to be definitive. It only proves "definitive" is often a synonym for dull. □

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How Frank Stella flip-flopped and stayed classic.

STELLAR TURNS

BY JED PERL

THE ABSTRACT RELIEF constructions that Frank Stella has been producing during the past decade are chaotic and overstuffed, but they're also terrifically swank. In the recent retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art of Stella's work since 1970, one saw the 51-year-old artist upping the ante—adding more and more elements, going into deeper and deeper space. The first reliefs, from the Polish Village Series of the early '70s, are done in plywood and other composition boards, and don't project very far off the wall. These constructions, named after the wooden synagogues of Poland that were destroyed by Hitler, show Stella in a Russian modernist mood, adapting sharply angled forms from the early 20th-century work of Kasimir Malevich and El Lissitzky. The compositions, full of overlapping triangular forms, are cool and sly, like origami tricks. Stella is just getting into the third dimension here, and he's not trying to do too many things at once. At the Modern, the Polish Village Series was a prologue, after which the action began to heat up very fast.

Since the mid-'70s Stella has been turning out dozens of ten- and 12-foot works every year. He's gone from wood to aluminum and from straight forms to curving forms, and his changes of medium and style have been so rapid-fire that it's become rather difficult to relate to his vast output as something human-scaled. This recent work has an impacted, layered look. In some cases the individual metal shapes are kept tightly contained, in roughly rectangular configurations; in other cases the shapes break out of the rectangle, and the reliefs look like plants that are growing in two or three directions at once. While Stella is undoubtedly a dynamo, the fruits of his manic productivity are disjointed, arbitrary-looking. If compulsiveness is now Stella's real subject, he never stands still long enough to analyze his obsession. In the Exotic Bird Series and the Indian Bird Series (1976-80), the forms, which are known in drafting offices as "irregular curves," are probably meant as a wacky update on the rococo style. The color in the Birds, which often consists of jarring combinations of pink and red and green, is certainly supposed to sizzle. But Stella doesn't ever work through the logic of his language, and the effects remain ambiguous, half-cooked.

As the relief extends farther and farther off the wall in the work of the late '70s, Stella's effects become increasingly costumey and imposing. Stella keeps adding more ingredients to his strange stew: metal tubing and wire mesh, graffiti-style paint handling, and gobs of glitter. A lot of the constructions look too much like the reminiscence of a shopping trip to New York's Canal Street, where the discount stores sell colored plastics and high-tech odds and ends. By the early '80s, with the works in the Circuit Series, which project a couple of feet off the wall and are covered with frenetic scribbling, Stella is on image overload. The compositions have no air; they don't expand in the imagination. Stella is caught in a house of mirrors where all he can see are adumbrations of his own ideas. In the recent Cones and Pillars Series (they're done on a combination of canvas, etched magnesium, aluminum, and fiberglass) the acute angles of the Polish Villages return, only in a jazzed-up, illusionistic form.

No expense has been spared on Stella's cacophonous assemblages; and the captains of industry who buy them for use as decorations at the office and in the home surely feel a more than passing sympathy with Stella's high-tech fun house sensibility. This artist is an intellectual who traces the lineage of his hulking parti-colored labyrinths back to the Baroque paintings of the 17th century. He's also a cigar-smoking celebrity, with a typical upscale taste for playing squash and driving fast cars. Stella's constructions are like suits of armor designed to be worn at a Venetian masked ball. The designer is an impresario of fashion, culture, and aesthetic history, a favorite son of the uptown gallery world, and of the most powerful modern art institution in the world.

Stella was 23 when he made his debut at the Museum of Modern Art in the "Sixteen Americans" show of 1959. In the catalog there's a photograph of Stella in a dark suit, looking very young and very sure of himself—like a kid who's just won the high school science prize. He was the boy of the moment. Abstract Expressionism's glorious decade was at a close, and Stella was exhibiting a series of Minimalist black paintings, decorated with regular pin-striped divisions, that some people believed brought modernism to a new peak of formalist restraint. It was a heady and controversial appearance for an artist who hadn't yet had a one-man show in New York. To Stella, arriving at the Museum of Modern Art must have been like being admitted to the Academy of Modern Art. It didn't hurt that Leo Castelli, the coming dealer of the day, had taken him on around the same time. While Pop Art was on the verge of exploding the modern orthodoxies (Jasper Johns was also in "Sixteen Americans"), Stella knew that most contemporary artists would echo Flaubert's words about the French Academy when they talked about MOMA—"Disparage it, but try to become a member, if possible." Stella was in, and he's stayed in ever since.

A few artists have become more famous than Stella since the beginning of the '60s; Stella isn't exactly in the Warhol league. Still, amid the stylistic push-and-pull of the past three decades, no one has had quite Stella's high-visibility staying power. (Johns has had staying power of a more reclusive sort.) Stella is an arbiter of taste. With the clout of the Modern and William Rubin, its director of painting and sculpture, squarely behind him, Stella has gone through a series of stylistic gyrations that have epitomized the modernist establishment's response to the changing times.

The sculptor Carl Andre, in a state-

"Frank Stella: Works from 1970 to 1987"
The Museum of Modern Art

Frank Stella, 1970-1987
by William Rubin
(The Museum of Modern Art, 172 pp., $45, $22.50 paper)

Working Space
by Frank Stella
(Harvard University Press, 196 pp., $40, $19.95 paper)

Jed Perl is the author of *Paris Without End: On French Art Since World War I*, to be published later this year by North Point Press.

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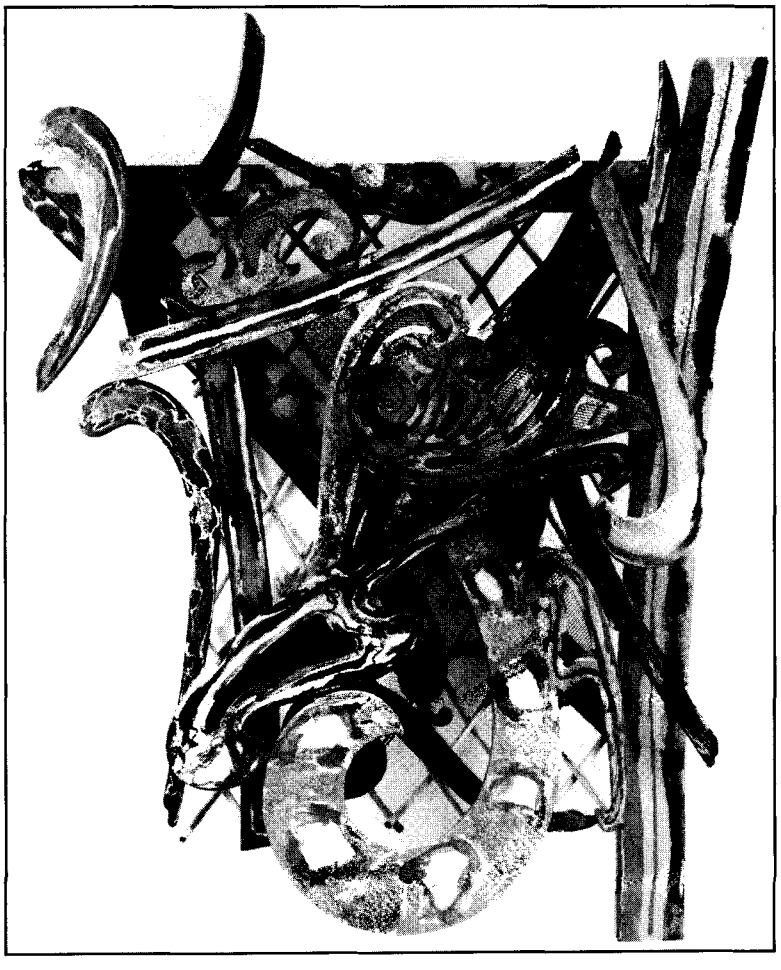
ment for the "Sixteen Americans" catalog, said that "Frank Stella is not interested in expression or sensitivity. He is interested in the necessities of painting." In the ensuing decade "the necessities of painting" turned out to have an awful lot to do with adjusting one's horizons to the pressures of Pop and Color Field and Op. Between 1959 and Stella's first MOMA retrospective in 1970, this wildly prolific artist went from all-black to all-copper, and then to various candy-colored designs. With Stella, abstraction looks rather like a tabula rasa, a mirror of the times.

In 1970 Stella was still declaring that Flatness Lives. But he was just about to do his volte-face and go into 3-D and announce that Anti-Flatness Lives. Was this a response to "the necessities of painting" or to the necessities of the times? I think the latter. After all, by 1970 abstraction was looking anemic; site-specific work was making the gallery beside the point; and a resurgent representation was attacking orthodox modernism from without. Some critics were wondering this past fall why Stella deserved a second MOMA retrospective. The question was, What is Stella to the Modern? The answer is, he's the Guardian of the Citadel.

The Modern may be too mandarin ever to admit publicly that it's under attack. Like many aging institutions, it's uncertain of its relation to a fluid situation, and belligerently confident that it will always lead the pack. For the Modern and for Rubin, who organized Stella's 1970 and 1987 retrospectives (the current exhibition is now on tour to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Pompidou Center in Paris, and then back to Minneapolis, Houston, and Los Angeles), Stella is the only artist who can effectively mediate between the changing times and the Modern's unchanging orthodoxy. While the Whitney throws a new brand of postmodernism before a happy public every couple of months, the Modern keeps offering updates on its generic modern product. Rubin and Stella will tell you that Stella's reliefs aren't postmodern, but updated modern. The distinction may seem academic, but academic is what the Modern has been about for years. The SoHo crowd may find Stella old hat (they prefer to get their high-toned hipness at the Whitney and Mary Boone), and the independents may believe Stella's view of modernism is compromised by his grasping ambition and his forays into pop taste. But the whole world stands in awe of the one artist who can make graffiti, glitter, and Day-Glo acceptable at the Modern. The Stella show is MOMA's definition of the way we are today, MOMA's message to the world.



RAM GANGRA (INDIAN BIRD SERIES). 1978

I went to see the Stella retrospective three times and on each occasion found it virtually impossible to home in on the work. Has there ever before in art been such a peculiar combination of hyperkinesis and impersonality? Stella's effects are relentless; his clashes of color and texture, his snaky rhythms and overlapping forms just go on and on. I'm not sure, though, how these hot tropical mazes are supposed to affect us. Stella's upbeat mood of recent years is as viewer-proof as the downbeat mood of the Black paintings of 30 years ago. I find no connection between the fictive painted space and the real empty space, except happenstance and sight gags. The reliefs offer no point of entry; Stella serves up passages of painting and black holes of nothing, and calls it art.

Stella has been working toward the frenzied effects of his recent reliefs for years, and yet everything he's letting out of his studio looks uncertain, insecure. The constructions are assembled by a staff of assistants from squared-off drawings and maquettes, and when you're looking at the work it's hard to forget that the artist is manipulating large metal forms that he obviously didn't create single-handedly. This assembly-line method of production has implications that Stella hasn't ever really confronted. Doesn't he realize that the autograph quality so essential to the spirit of modern art is in danger of being lost? He may want his works to look peppy, like improvisations; but his forms, which are clearly machine-tooled, trigger a different set of associations. Stella's jazzy effects can't disguise the extent to which a cool and complicated factory process has come between us and whatever inspiration the artist may originally have had. There's nothing dynamic about the work; there's no action and reaction.

Yet the idea of the artist as a master builder who has other people do much of the work apparently has a certain appeal for Stella. The Renaissance and Baroque painters used a great many studio assistants, and Stella, who in recent years has frequently expressed his admiration for Raphael and Rubens and

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Caravaggio, perhaps feels closer to those old masters than to modern artists such as Cézanne and Matisse, who worked alone. Stella's career has been conducted in public, and he revels in the high visibility of his art. When he talks about his constructions—which he's done quite frequently in recent years—he tends to explain them not in terms of personal need, but in terms of the needs of history. Surely he's not the first modern to claim history for his side; but there's quite a difference between the crazily visionary manifestos of a loner like Mondrian, who knew he was crying in the wilderness, and Stella, who has the big guns of MOMA with him every inch of the way.

STELLA HAS NO interest in the kind of fragmentary poetic observations that we often find in the writings of modern French artists such as Matisse, Picasso, and Braque. When Stella speaks out, it's in broad, general terms. He seems to have a taste for old-fashioned discourses, for laying down the law. And when Harvard University asked him to give the Norton Lectures in 1983-84, the occasion was a natural. It was the Academy of Modern Art meeting the Academy Itself. Stella stood up at Harvard and told the assembled Ivy League that the answer to modernism's travails was . . . academic Baroque art.

In *Working Space*, the published version of the lectures, Stella is extraordinarily incurious about the "museum without walls" that has been inspiring painters since the latter part of the 19th century. It's not Stella's way to want to enrich Western art with the visions of Africa, Islam, Japan, folk art, early Christianity. In Stella's version of seriousness, anything that isn't European easel painting isn't really of use. To some observers Stella's recent work is the ultimate synthesis of the decorative and the abstract, but the fact is that by rejecting non-European and pre-Renaissance art Stella has rejected the decoration of the East and the Middle East, the pattern and the ornament from which Matisse and others learned to organize their paintings in new ways. For Stella, decoration is surface interest—a colored skin stretched over a deep space that's derived from 17th-century figure composition. Right at the outset of *Working Space* Stella announces that "although we deeply appreciate art before the Renaissance, it remains qualified in our eyes." Picasso would have been shocked by this idea.

As has by now been pointed out many times, the unspoken presence in *Working Space* is Clement Greenberg, the critic who defined modern art as a struggle to isolate the essence of Western art. Actually the book tracks a love-hate relationship with Greenberg. Stella's lack of curiosity about non-Western art mirrors Greenberg's own; and the more one thinks about Stella's argument, the more it seems like an old-fashioned formalist discourse that's been given a postmodern twist. At the moment when Greenbergian modernism, with its lockstep march toward flatness, is being attacked on all sides, Stella is giving formalism radical surgery, explaining, We'll do this and this and this, and modernism will be able to carry on. Stella has a knack for picking up on a generally accepted sense of disaffection and dissatisfaction, but what he ultimately offers as an alternative isn't much more than a few scattered insights. People pick up Stella's book because they agree with him that something's awry; they read on because he doesn't paint too grim a picture.

When Stella says that "abstraction has to recognize that the coziness it has created with its sense of reduced, shallow illusionism is not going anywhere," he could be any '80s artist griping about the

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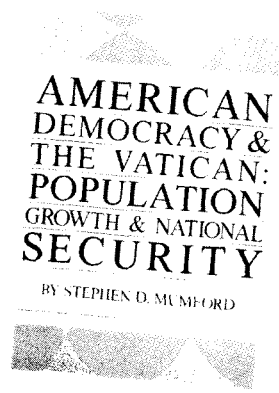

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sorry state of art. Stella has a cure. He believes that the way for artists to bring the bloom of health back to abstract art is to make a close study of figure composition from Raphael (a painter Picasso and Braque detested) to Caravaggio (a renegade whose work founded an academy) and Rubens (whose "Maria de' Medici" cycle, which hangs in the Louvre, has impressed generations of artists as an unapproachable masterpiece of rhetorical style). Though Stella is too canny to acknowledge the influence of those less famous than he, I believe that part of what has turned his attention to the Baroque is the group of artists who, since the '60s, have returned to representation—and even, in some cases, to figure composition based on Renaissance and Baroque models. At the Modern, realism may remain the ultimate no-no; but Stella, a child of the zeitgeist, recognizes a challenge when he sees one. He understands that people are yearning for narrative, for storytelling, for legible spatial relationships.

"The aim of art," Stella says, "is to create space—space that is not compromised by decoration or illustration." This sounds pretty formalist—and many of us will wonder, What about emotion, sensibility, metaphoric ideas? Stella may not have a very good answer to our questions, but he knows that we're asking them. He explains that he wants a "space in which the subjects of painting can live." "Subject" is the wild card in the argument; it's the doppelgänger that Stella wants included but can't quite show us how to include. From the evidence of his extraordinarily prolific career, I'd say Stella confuses subject with style: what he regards as putting a subject in a space, I'd regard as interior decor.

Greenberg made the modern artist's struggle to achieve purity—to eliminate narrative and representation—sound heroic, emotionally compelling. That's the genius of his criticism. Though Greenberg's intellectual clarity is way beyond Frank Stella, Stella too wants to give formalism a human face—that "subject." He somehow wants painting to be about space, but also about all the things that Caravaggio and Rubens put into that space. Stella says that Caravaggio "declares that pictorial drama is everything in art." In Caravaggio, Stella sees "the sense of a shaped spatial presence enveloping the action of the painting." Formalism again. But in the same pages Stella is praising Caravaggio's *Saint John* as "caressable, kissable." He says that "Caravaggio's boy has an aura that cannot be missed—this is the face that launched great painting. Beneath this self-satisfied, cheeky smile lies aggressive ambition, a feeling that this youthful success can rival Titian's glory."

So the formalist is a romantic, explaining that this good-looking boy-saint is Caravaggio's stand-in. It's an odd two-step of a passage. Stella gets you from content to form without showing you the transition; there isn't any transition. Basically, Stella regards Caravaggio in the same light as the art historians who've called Caravaggio the first modern—not so much in a formal sense as in the romantic sense of the artist as a man possessed.

Stella skididdles from pictorial to extrapictorial concerns. In *Working Space* it's never explained how he will achieve Caravaggesque drama while painting paintings that are non-objective, that have no human drama. What is Caravaggio's drama, if not human drama? Looking from Stella's reliefs to the Caravaggios, you can see what Stella has taken from Caravaggio—the dramatic tilt or curving arabesques of space. But in place of the sensuous boy or biblical wise man or dirty servant in the Caravaggio, we get graffiti and glitter. In his lectures Stella invokes the later work of Kandinsky as a model; but he won't accept the fact that Kandinsky had a subject, which was derived from the life of plants, the mechanics of nature, Russian folk art. As an artist Stella has no subject to speak of, which is probably why those of us who write about him can find little to discuss other than Stella's theories and Stella's career.

HOVERING AROUND all of Stella's recent work is an age-old argument about the relative values of painting and sculpture, the pictorial and the sculptural, the optical and the tactile. Stella wants to make painting once again spacious, tactile, which he's done by making sculptures and calling them paintings. It's a gambit so flagrant one feels like a fool calling the bluff. What may ultimately be more interesting than Stella's invariable references to his reliefs as paintings is the desperation with which he and Rubin insist on this version of the Emperor's New Clothes.

There can be no question as to why Rubin and Stella are so concerned to prove that Stella is still a painter. Stella's first fame was based on Minimalist paintings; his lasting fame is as a painter who abandoned Minimalism. The dilemma for Stella has been to find a way to move away from the absolute flatness of

An Ordinary Morning In Las Vegas

My right hand's a claw from the slots.
You get so you don't even love it.
"One Thousand Coins Jackpot" played when he died.
She wept, her hair was on fire.

You get so you don't even love it—
there's a place of stasis beyond desire.
She wept, her hair was on fire.
Fruit and spirochetes spinning in the pit.

There's a place of stasis beyond desire
but you can wash your hands every hour.
God spins His fruit here. *And His spirochetes.*
The blackjack woman has all the power.

You want to wash your hands every hour.
"No brotherhood," he sighed, "like craps."
The blackjack woman has all the power
but complains—diminution of desire!

"No brotherhood," he sighed, "like craps."
The croupier's an Eisenhower heir
but complains of diminution of desire.
Germs breed in mucus, coin, and hair.

The croupier's an Eisenhower heir.
Eight decks of cards in his power!
Germs breed in mucus, coin, and hair so
you ought to wash your hands every hour.

"One Thousand Silver Coins" played at his cremation.
The roulette wheel?—gummed up with matzo
crumbs. We'll always love each other she said—but
my right hand's a claw from the slots.

You can wash your hands every hour.
You want to wash your hands every hour.
You ought to wash your hands every hour.
You *must* wash your hands every hour.

JOYCE CAROL OATES

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his first decade without undoing the central assumptions of that work. I believe that the introduction of an illusion of depth into a two-dimensional surface was always a plain impossibility for Stella, because it would have called into question the flatness of everything he's already done. Stella would agree with Gertrude Stein when she said that "anything in a painting that imitates air is illustration and not art." For Stella, going into a real third dimension was the only way to allow air into his paintings—thus the reliefs of the past 15 years.

FOR THOSE of us who've always thought of the Museum of Modern Art as serenely secure in its vision of the historical succession, Rubin's essay on Stella in the Modern's catalog marks a new era, an era when the hard sell masks an underlying insecurity. Rubin's text is scaled big, like Stella's work. The exposition may be tortuous, but then Rubin will spare no lengths of analysis and description in order to guide us through Stella's move from flatness into deep space, and to situate the Academy of Modern Art squarely behind the recent Stellas. Rubin's snail's-pace exegesis of work after work and series after series sounds remarkably self-effacing on the part of an eminence of the museum world, but the ultimate effect is to bury the artist.

Stella's big relief constructions, with their Day-Glo colors and graffiti-art effects, are an attempt to graft the kitschy art fads of the past 15 years onto a conservative modernist taste. Strip off the razzmatazz surfaces and you find underneath some rather stodgy Constructivist sculpture. Stella is turning kitsch into—neo-kitsch? meta-kitsch? He's making an accommodation between the Academy and the hordes outside the gates; and Rubin, who compares Stella to Dante, Shakespeare, and Picasso, wants to convince us that Stella's every twirl and curl and curve is solid gold.

Frank Stella has brought the circus sensibility of the early '80s to the Museum of Modern Art. A circus at the Academy? Why not? With the Norton Lectures under his belt, Stella can probably put anything over now. *Working Space* tells us we can solve our problems and carry on. The metal constructions tell us that things have to change, but not too much. The Stella retrospective is a celebration. All's well in the Academy. According to Rubin, this is The Greatest Show on Earth. □

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THE RETURN OF THE LIVING FED

Secrets of the Temple: How the Federal Reserve Runs the Country by William Greider

(Simon and Schuster, 798 pp., $24.95)

The Federal Reserve was once an obscure place. Congress created it in 1913 to prevent banking panics, but no one except economists and bankers paid it much attention. Paul Volcker changed that. As chairman of the Fed for eight years, Volcker ran the war against double-digit inflation. His campaign wasn't subtle. It was the economic equivalent of Sherman's march to the sea. He raised interest rates and triggered the severe recession of 1981-82. The wage-price spiral collapsed under the weight of high unemployment, idle factories, and gluts of grains. No one liked the campaign, but almost everyone approved the result. By the late '70s, Americans were alarmed by rising inflation. It prevented personal planning and threatened a healthy economy. Volcker rescued the country from this grim future and, in the process, became something of a hero.

Volcker left the Fed last summer, and already his star status is under siege. William Greider, a former editor at the *Washington Post* and now a writer for *Rolling Stone*, disputes the popular wisdom. As Greider sees it, the arcane process of regulating interest rates and the money supply is a giant morality tale. There are big winners and big losers, and the Fed decides who they are. Greider finds Volcker's policies too harsh, and as a result, the victims—dispossessed farmers, unemployed factory workers, the urban poor—were too numerous and suffered too much. Volcker didn't serve the popular will, but Wall Street. Rich investors and banks benefited, because lower inflation sharply increased stock and bond prices. Indeed, Greider argues, the whole anti-inflation campaign was undemocratic. No one elected Volcker, and he evaded control by the White House or Congress. Finally, his policies didn't improve the economy's future. The stock market crash of October deepens Greider's skepticism.

Greider's revisionism revives 19th-century populist ideas that "sound money" oppresses workers, farmers, and small businesses. But his case fails, because it never confronts the reality of inflation. According to Greider, a little inflation is a good thing. It increases economic growth and redistributes wealth away from the rich (mainly creditors) and toward the homeowning middle class and the poor (mainly debtors). This view of inflation is a fantasy.

Yes, a little inflation may temporarily spur the economy. Low interest rates encourage borrowing and spending. Yes, inflation may temporarily redistribute wealth away from creditors to debtors. Those who borrow early in an inflation can repay debts with cheaper dollars. But these tonic effects don't last. To perpetuate them, government has to create ever-rising inflation, and accelerating inflation triggers nasty side effects. Businesses and families spend more time trying to profit from inflation, or to protect against it. Speculation grows, and productive activity suffers. Politics is poisoned. Government is discredited because it's correctly blamed for inflation.

We know all this because we conducted a 20-year national experiment. In 1960 inflation (as measured by the consumer price index) was 1.6 percent. By 1980 it was 13.5 percent. During much of this period, government was committed to maintaining "full employment." Enlightened opinion held that sophisticated economic policies could attain this blissful state. A little extra inflation was considered a likely, but acceptable, consequence. High demand and tight labor markets would exert upward pressure on wages and prices. But the formula didn't work. Not only did inflation continually accelerate, but after the initial drop in unemployment in the '60s, average unemployment rates began to rise. Stagflation was added to the nation's vocabulary.

The implications of this history escape Greider. He never draws the crucial distinction between a little extra inflation and accelerating inflation. Only by fudging the issue can he maintain his enthusiasm for inflation. Otherwise, he'd have to concede that its beneficial effects are passing. He'd also have to face the necessity of recessions as the only practical way to check inflation. Sagging business sales and rising unemployment depress price and wage increases, as competition for customers and jobs rises. In the '60s and '70s, this restraint was lost. Government tried to prevent recessions and, when they occurred, moved quickly—through tax cuts, higher spending, and low interest rates—to end them. As fears of bankruptcy and unemployment faded, businesses and workers felt less need to limit price and wage increases. Thus a two percent inflation could rise to four percent, to six percent, and then higher. New inflationary pressures, such as scarcities of skilled workers or raw materials, worsened the existing inflation.

To understand this process is to see Volcker's performance in a different light. By the time he arrived at the Fed, all the choices were bad. High inflation poses a dilemma. Tolerating it saps the productive economy and sows public cynicism. Crushing it hurts those who expect inflation to continue. In 1982 civilian unemployment averaged 9.7 percent. Between 1980 and 1986, the number of farms dropped by more than 200,000. But blaming Volcker for this suffering, as Greider does, is silly. It's like blaming generals for war. The recession's victims were dupes of the idea that a little more inflation is harmless. The recession was severe because inflation was severe, and the recession was intended to break inflation. Farmers who had borrowed on the prospect of rising land prices were crushed. So were workers and industries whose costs had become uncompetitive. Developing countries that had borrowed on expectations of higher raw material prices plunged into the Third World debt crisis.

The idea that Volcker single-handedly conducted the campaign against inflation is also absurd. True, Volcker had great freedom in running the Federal Reserve. True, someone less determined might have eased the attack against inflation sooner. But Volcker was not operating a renegade government. At critical junctures, both Presidents Carter and Reagan approved his policies. They supported him because, most simply, the public felt that inflation was getting out of control. A subsequent study of opinion polls by William Schneider and Seymour Martin Lipset confirms that rising inflation was the most important cause of dwindling confidence in national leadership. People tried to protect them-

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selves against money's shrinking value. There was growing speculation in real estate, farmland, coins, jewelry, and antiques.

WHAT GREIDER might have given us—but doesn't—is a sensible idea of how money can best be managed in the nation's long-term interests. Greider is a graceful writer and a superb reporter. His book recreates the desperate mood that turned the country against inflation and provides a detailed picture of the complex relations between the Fed and the White House. The trouble is that Greider's reporting repeatedly subverts his populist themes. He ignores the contradictions and never defines the realistic limits of the Fed's powers.

At its extremes, that power is awesome. The Fed can so starve the economy of money and credit that it causes a depression; or it can create so much money and credit that there's runaway inflation. But between these extremes, the Fed is a muscle-bound giant. It mainly influences a single interest rate, the so-called Federal Funds rate. This is the rate at which commercial banks make overnight loans to each other. The Fed influences this rate by buying and selling U.S. Treasury securities, such as Treasury bills or bonds. When it buys securities, the Fed pays for them with money the banks don't already have; it injects new money into the system, and the Fed Funds rate tends to drop. By selling securities, the Fed drains money from the system; the Fed Funds rate tends to rise.

Ideally, the Fed would create enough new money and credit to maintain full employment without inflation. In practice, no one knows how to do that. No one knows exactly how given policy changes will affect economic growth, unemployment, or inflation. The process resembles a Rube Goldberg contraption. Changes in the Fed Funds rate affect other interest rates, which affect business and consumer borrowing, which affect production, employment, and inflation. But the connections aren't simple or stable. Other influences—government policies, technology, expectations—dilute the Fed's powers. Mistakes are inevitable. Things rarely turn out precisely as expected; the economy is weaker or stronger than predicted. People at the Fed can cope with such uncertainty only by having an overriding sense of purpose, which determines which risks they will or won't take. Hence, the need for consensus.

It doesn't exist, but it should. The experience of the past century provides a standard. History does not reaffirm, as Greider contends, the charms of a little inflation. Its lesson is that major shifts of prices—up or down—cause much needless social and economic havoc. Preserving a crude price stability is the Fed's most useful public purpose. Because major price changes are usually unanticipated, they disrupt business relations and expectations. Inflation has been a problem, but so has deflation, which is a major decline in prices.

During the Great Depression, prices dropped by almost one-quarter between 1929 and 1933. As prices collapsed, borrowers couldn't repay loans. Lower prices had reduced their incomes. When borrowers defaulted, banks became insolvent. The failure of some banks spread the fear that other banks would fail. Depositors withdrew funds, which prompted banks to reduce loans. More firms and farms went bankrupt. The economy got worse, forcing down prices more and accelerating the vicious circle. The Great Depression stemmed from this credit collapse. About two-fifths of U.S. banks failed between 1929 and 1933.

The Great Depression isn't an isolated example of the perils of unstable money. Under the late 19th century's gold standard (paper currency could theoretically be exchanged for gold coin), limited amounts of gold meant that the nation's currency didn't expand sufficiently to meet the needs of a growing economy. Repeated business depressions pushed prices down; between 1865 and 1896, the cumulative wholesale price decline was more than half. Populism flourished, but Greider draws a false analogy between the preoccupation with "sound money" then and now. Money then wasn't stable; declining prices meant money's value was rising. Populist farmers and small businessmen felt (correctly) that a system that required them to repay their loans in dearer dollars was unfair. The more recent inflation repeats the basic pattern: as price changes accelerated, events quickly took on a momentum of their own and moved out of government's control.

OF COURSE, Greider thinks that the Fed already follows a consensus. The Fed developed a culture that favors Wall Street. Preoccupied with interest rates, Fed officials are in constant contact with bankers and bond traders. The Fed, he argues, restrains economic growth and

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suppresses inflation to support bond prices and bank profits. Bond prices vary inversely with interest rates: an investor who buys a $10,000 bond with a ten percent interest rate will suffer a loss if interest rates subsequently rise to 11 percent; the bond can only be sold for less than $10,000 for the new buyers to receive the market interest rate of 11 percent. Interest rates reflect some expectation of future inflation. Thus higher-than-expected inflation will raise interest rates and hurt bond investors.

As logical as this sounds, it doesn't explain the Fed's behavior. If it did, the inescapable conclusion would be that the Fed is a poor guardian of Wall Street. During much of the postwar period, especially during the '60s and '70s, bond investors fared poorly; they suffered losses or barely preserved their investment against unexpected inflation. It's true that inflation's decline triggered huge bond and stock rallies. (The logic also works in reverse: if inflation—and inflationary expectations—drop, then bond prices rise.) Although this was a result of Volcker's austerity, it was hardly its central purpose. As for banks, they haven't been helped by inflation's decline. More commercial banks (621) have failed since 1982 than at any time since the Depression. Banks' profitability (measured as a return on their total assets) has dropped in the '80s. Bad loans have taken their toll.

WHAT ACTUALLY influences the Fed is conventional wisdom, public opinion, and political pressure, primarily from the White House. Of these, conventional wisdom is the most underrated. Recall the Great Depression. Why didn't the Fed fulfill its original purpose of protecting the banking system? In times of crisis, people wanted cash. Private banks couldn't provide enough currency. Congress created the Fed to lend currency to banks to counter a surge of withdrawals and prevent a credit collapse. But the Fed faced a conflict between supplying paper currency and safeguarding the gold standard. In the early '30s it opted to protect the gold standard. It feared that pumping too many dollars into the economy would cause foreigners to lose confidence. They would cash in dollars for gold. Faith in the gold standard was the conventional wisdom of the day. Indeed, the Depression caused countries to abandon the gold standard, because preserving it meant sacrificing the real economy of people and businesses.

Since then, politics and conventional wisdom have continued to guide the Fed. During the '60s and '70s it kept interest rates low to accommodate the ambitious economics launched in the Kennedy-Johnson years. Faith in Keynesianism was widespread. "I am one of those who came out of graduate school convinced that a little inflation was a good thing," Charles Partee, a top Fed official in the '70s and '80s, told Greider. But the Fed also went along because it had no choice. In the '50s Fed Chairman William McChesney Martin served comfortably under Eisenhower, because both men detested inflation. The Fed's role, Martin once said, is "to take away the punch bowl just when the party gets going." There were three recessions during the Eisenhower years. But Martin adjusted. In 1965 he briefly challenged Johnson's economic policy. Both inflation and spending on the war in Vietnam were rising. Martin raised interest rates; Johnson was furious. Martin kept the mild anti-inflationary posture into 1966, then relented and never again defied the president.

THE FED'S responsiveness to the White House reflects commonsense politics, not law. On paper, the Fed is "independent" from the president and accountable only to Congress. In practice, the process works the other way around. Congress has modest influence; the president has a lot. The president is most responsible for national economic policy. More important, an unhappy president might propose that the Fed be moved into the executive. So an uneasy relationship exists between the Fed and the White House. Nominally, the Fed remains independent. It enjoys considerable freedom in its daily decisions. There may be minor or temporary conflicts. But fundamental struggles over who's in charge are rare. When they occur, the outcome is virtually preordained: the president prevails.

The stewardship of Volcker—perhaps the most powerful Fed chairman ever—confirms this awkward relationship. In many ways, Volcker was (as Greider says) a shrewd Washington insider whose political skills kept him unentangled. As a former high Treasury official in the Kennedy and Nixon administrations, he had wide political contacts. He talked often to congressmen and interest groups, listening carefully to their complaints. Accessibility is important in politics, but Volcker could also remain non-committal without being offensive. At times he was disarmingly obscure. One good example occurred after he left the Fed. He was asked the meaning of the stock market crash. "The lesson of this week," he said, "is that we should be doing those things we should have been doing all along to take care of the imbalances in the economy." Who could disagree—or say what it meant?

But as Greider's reporting shows, these strengths didn't make Volcker a free spirit. Although his nomination in the summer of 1979 was something of an accident, Volcker made it clear in advance that he meant to change things. Carter needed a new Fed chairman, because he was naming the incumbent, G. William Miller, Treasury secretary to replace W. Michael Blumenthal, who was being fired. But before being nominated, Volcker met with Carter and, writes Greider, "elaborated the reasons why the Federal Reserve's money policy should be tightened." Put another way: picking Volcker was a policy change, and if Carter didn't want a change, he could have nominated someone else.

Volcker moved quickly to modify the Fed's technical procedures: instead of controlling the Fed Funds rate directly, the Fed would primarily regulate the amount of money it injected into the banking system. There was an obvious danger. Limiting the amount of new money could raise interest rates sharply and trigger a recession. With an election approaching, Carter's chief economic advisers recognized the risk. They failed to dissuade Volcker from acting. They then appealed to Carter to intervene. He refused and, in effect, endorsed Volcker's action. A few months later, the roles were reversed. The White House prepared its own anti-inflation program, including controls on credit card use to be imposed by the Fed. Volcker opposed the credit controls. So did other members of the Fed. The president insisted. Legally the Fed could have refused. It didn't. The twin episodes underscored the president's primacy. As Fed official Partee said: "You never want a confrontation where a president says, 'Do this' and we say, 'We won't.' "

UNDER REAGAN, the same murky relationship continued. Volcker and the president actually saw each other infrequently. Sometimes Volcker's policies displeased members of the White House staff or the Treasury, resulting in newspaper stories citing anonymous officials. But the president was rarely among Volcker's critics. No one, including

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Volcker, anticipated the severity of the 1981-82 recession. But Volcker was determined to maintain a tight policy long enough to reduce price and wage increases. There's no evidence Reagan disapproved. He had campaigned vigorously against inflation. At one mid-1981 meeting, he lectured Volcker on the need to control the money supply. "Volcker couldn't have come out of that meeting thinking anything but that the White House wanted tightening," budget director David Stockman said later. After a meeting in early 1982, with unemployment nearing nine percent, the president publicly endorsed Volcker.

The alliance between the two men was unplanned, yet their strengths were well matched. Reagan's style of governing was aloof, passive, and patient; he expressed broad themes and disliked interfering with subordinates. Volcker valued his freedom and had confidence in his own instincts. Both men made judgments. Reagan judged that it would be better to have a recession sooner rather than later. Volcker judged that only a harsh recession would truly squeeze inflation. No one can say what might have happened with another president or Fed chairman, but persisting stagflation is a good possibility. A milder recession would have left unemployment and inflation high. Government would have remained in disrepute, viewed as incapable of squelching inflation or promoting expansion.

OF COURSE Volcker's performance wasn't perfect. Plenty of mistakes were made. At best, his handling of the Third World debt crisis was mediocre. But Greider's contentions that the economy is weaker than in the late '70s, and that the Federal Reserve has deliberately suppressed expansion, are difficult to take seriously. The current recovery has now lasted more than five years. The number of jobs has grown by nearly 15 million. Output of goods and services (gross national product) has risen about 20 percent. Productivity—the efficiency of business, which is reflected in living standards—is increasing at about twice the rate of the late '70s, though that's still below the postwar average. Yes, there are problems. Huge trade and budget deficits persist; so does stubborn poverty. Yes, the stock market crash points to uncertainties about the world economy. But it's hard to imagine that things would be healthier if inflation were double or triple its current rate.

And yet Greider extols inflation. If "kept to reasonable proportions," it would spur greater growth, while helping farmers and industrial workers. What are "reasonable proportions"? He never says. How would it be kept there? He never says. He occasionally mentions the possibility of economic controls, but the argument is never developed. It would be a tough case to make. Since the mid-'60s, the United States has experimented with wage-price controls, credit controls, and controls on oil. All the controls have broken down, the victims of unintended consequences and, as a result of perceived inequities or administrative absurdities, dwindling public support. Carter's fling with credit controls was a disaster. It triggered a brief recession, which was the last thing the president and his advisers wanted.

THE QUESTION of inflation—and, therefore, of the Federal Reserve—ultimately involves coming to grips with the practical limits of government's powers. Inflation has become an endemic feature of American life only since World War II. Until then, large inflations were rare events almost always caused, as Greider shows, by wars. Wars require government to suppress private consumption and investment in order to mobilize the country's resources for fighting. Inflation is a way of financing this diversion. The government commands what it needs by paying its bills in currency that buys less of other products and services. It's unpleasant, but so are the alternatives: higher taxes, lower non-military spending, or crushing debt. Thus inflation is essentially a political process that reflects government's excessive commitments. Past inflations have subsided, because after the wars the government's commitments subsided. As late as 1929, federal spending was about three percent of GNP.

The advent of Big Government after World War II changed this situation entirely. Inflationary pressures became permanent, because the nature of modern government is to make new commitments. Programs proliferated to cure the defects of private markets and to aid disadvantaged groups. By the 1960s full employment had become an explicit goal. Politicians again faced the problem of paying for commitments without exceeding the public tolerance for higher taxes. The ambitious economics of the 1960s seemed to offer a way out. Faster economic growth would fulfill some commitments (full employment) directly, while providing more tax revenues to fulfill other commitments. The Federal Reserve joined the consensus. Interest rates stayed low, and growth of the money supply accelerated. The resulting inflation resembled previous wartime inflations: it reflected the gap between government's commitments and its competence.

GREIDER WANTS the Fed to be made more accountable to elected officials. He is not the first, of course, to notice the contrast between the Fed's huge powers and its crude accountability. Milton Friedman, the free market economist and political libertarian, has long advocated that Congress circumscribe the Fed's powers. But Greider and Friedman don't agree on what the Fed ought to be ordered to do. While Greider prefers inflation, Friedman proposes strict rules intended to suppress it. And there's the rub. With no agreement on what the Fed should do, practical politicians won't move to control it. But if there were agreement, little control would be needed. The Fed is a responsive institution. It would react to a clear consensus. The Fed exists in a twilight zone of political accountability because its role is to make choices that others deem necessary but don't wish to make publicly.

It's more important to define better what the Fed can and can't do than to find it a new place in the government's organization table. The price stability that the Fed can realistically maintain doesn't mean achieving zero percent recorded inflation each year. The price statistics aren't accurate enough, nor is the Fed's control precise enough, to attain this sort of result. Price changes between minus one and plus two (or even plus three) percent annually are within an acceptable margin of error. But once price changes exceed these thresholds, allowing them to get worse threatens more harm than good. Inflation and deflation are twin dangers, but of the two, inflation is the more likely. There's no secret about how to check it. The Fed must slow down the economy. If inflationary pressures are large or the Fed miscalculates, recessions will result. No economist has yet unveiled a practical alternative.

This is not utopia. It is the lesser evil. A constant economic boom, if possible, would be preferable; it would minimize unemployment and maximize government revenues. But it's important to

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keep perspective on the virtues of booms and the vices of recessions. Even a constant boom wouldn't cure all the nation's social ills. The pervasive prosperity of the '60s didn't make ghettos glisten or illiterates read. Some problems can't be treated by applying more prosperity; the faith in prosperity's therapeutic powers is one of the great postwar delusions.

By contrast, everyone regards a recession as a great evil. It isn't. Recessions are problems, but they aren't catastrophes. Recessions end; even during recessions, most unemployment doesn't last long. With the gold standard's demise, government—that is, the Fed—ought to have enough flexibility in managing interest rates and credit availability to avoid deep and prolonged business slumps.

In one sense, Greider's picture of the Federal Reserve and the Volcker era is entirely accurate. It mirrors wider public confusions and contradictions. Volcker has bequeathed his successor, Alan Greenspan, lower inflation, but the muddle in public thinking that created inflation remains. Our political and journalistic culture has strong taboos. Some admissions are off-limits because they seem too unpleasant or too dour. Almost no one (except Greider) cheers inflation, but almost no one wants to face the prospect of another recession. So recessions are endlessly deplored, and there remains much pressure on the Fed to accomplish the impossible: to restrain inflation and avoid recessions forever. People always like to think that the most recent recession was the last.

The great social and economic problems of this country transcend the business cycle, and the trouble with the dogmatic pursuit of prosperity as a social panacea is that it risks adding to our problems. The history of the past quarter century—first, inflation's upward spiral, then the severe slump of the early '80s—ought to be ample warning. Surely no sensible person would want to repeat the traumatic ride up and down inflation's roller coaster. But unless we draw the right conclusions from recent experience, we may risk just that.

ROBERT SAMUELSON

Robert Samuelson's columns on economic affairs appear in *Newsweek*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and other newspapers.

THE CORRUPT COMPUTER

Electric Language: A Philosophical Study of Word Processing by Michael Heim

(Yale University Press, 305 pp., $19.95)

The computer lets you write easily for the same reasons it lets you write badly. A blank sheet of paper contains far more terrors than a blank computer screen. The blank page offers nothing but emptiness, silence, and dread. The blank screen glows with anticipation of the words it so readily accepts. No one but a solitary writer can fill the vacancy of the blank page. The computer itself is always ready to fill the screen with menus, messages, or instructions as soon as you touch a key. The screen asks little from a writer. You can fill it by typing fewer words than are needed to fill a five-by-eight card.

And behind the screen stands the invisible order of a word-processing program with its promise of regimented safety. Like any tyrant, a word-processing program both threatens and comforts. Obey its arbitrary inflexible rules, and it rewards you with tireless service in rearranging, removing, even correcting your words. Disobey its rules, and it responds either by issuing a warning beep and a terse instruction or by dissolving months of labor into scattered electrons. In millions of offices, the computer fulfills the tyrant's dream: it forbids everything that it does not permit.

When you work at a computer, you accept constraints as strict as barbed wire and watchtower. The screen's flickering energy captures your attention and narrows it to the screen's confines. Only the most determined will can shift its focus from the active screen to the static waste of books and papers that lie around it. When you work at a typewriter, it takes no effort to look from the page you are writing to the pages you have written already. You read the page on the desk and the page in the typewriter with the same eye movements, and your pupils need not adjust to changes in the intensity of light. But when you work at a computer, the light and action on the screen overwhelm not only the words on any printed pages nearby, but also the meaning of the words on the screen itself. The glow becomes more fascinating than the content. Just as the dullest television soap opera captures your attention in a darkened room, so the dullest prose glitters irresistibly on the word-processing screen.

But within its guarded borders, the computer screen can seem like a playground that grants infinite freedom. Don't look outside, don't question the rules, and you can play forever and without rebuke. Inside the screen, no milestones, no boundaries, no landmarks give any sense of rhythm, limit, or location. When you work on paper, you must pause at the end of each page and take the trouble to start again on another. The top and bottom of a sheet of paper are its unmistakable beginning and end, and you always know where you are. But when you work at a screen, you might as well be anywhere. You write on an imaginary surface with no beginning and no end. You can add anything without effort or interruption. Aristotle might have defined the dramatic plots written at a computer as having a middle, a middle, and a middle.

With typed or handwritten pages you can easily compare the beginning and the end for logic and consistency, or you can examine a dozen pages on a desk at once. With a computer, after much distracting effort, you can display a few lines from two or more sections of your work on the screen at the same time, but the effect is like studying a mural by comparing two brush strokes. The computer lets you forget while you write that a skeptical reader will someday read your prose in print and be able to turn effortlessly from one page to another, filling the margins with ironic comments on your forgetfulness and illogic. The computer lets you make small-scale revisions to individual sentences with an ease unimaginable on paper, but it can't help you revise the shape of the large-scale work whose scale it encourages you to forget.

Every writer should have one anyway. If you compose a first draft on paper and then revise a final draft on the computer, you can combine structural solidity and elegance of detail in the same piece of

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work. And two kinds of writing always turn out better when drafted entirely on a computer. Anything shorter than around a thousand words (the exact threshold differs for every writer) gains from the ease of correction. And anything written for a newspaper gains from the ease with which paragraphs can be shuffled from one place to another. Reporters use the inverted-pyramid construction, in which the weightiest fact occupies the opening paragraph and everything else follows in diminishing order of importance. A computer lets a journalist spew out paragraphs pell-mell and shift them up and down the pyramid at will. And it lets an editor cut off the story at any point without leaving loose ends.

But with any extended prose that seeks to analyze or comprehend, any narrative that recognizes the link between act and consequence, any writing that knows that lives can have purpose or direction, any words that seek to influence or illuminate, the computer eases the mechanical task of composition while quietly undermining coherence and truth. The author who produced books, when he worked on paper, that were lucid and compact now sits at a computer and writes flaccid maunderings that convince no one. When he worked on paper, he discovered that a forced and tendentious argument gave more trouble in the writing than a valid one; when the sentences were agonizing to write, the content was probably wrong. Now that he has a computer, he writes everything easily, and is convinced by any self-contradictory nonsense that he tosses on the screen. On the writing desk, as on the stock trading floor, the computer gives wings to high flyers—until the crash.

WRITERS WHO use a computer swear to its liberating power in tones that bear witness to the apocalyptic power of a new divinity. Their conviction results from something deeper than mere gratitude for the computer's conveniences. Every new medium of writing brings about new intensities of religious belief and new schisms among believers. In the 16th century the printed book helped make possible the split between Catholics and Protestants. In the 20th century this history of tragedy and triumph is repeating itself as farce. Those who worship the Apple computer and those who put their faith in the IBM PC are equally convinced that the other

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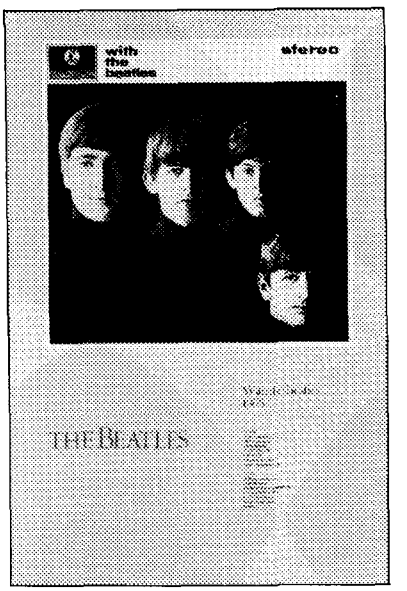

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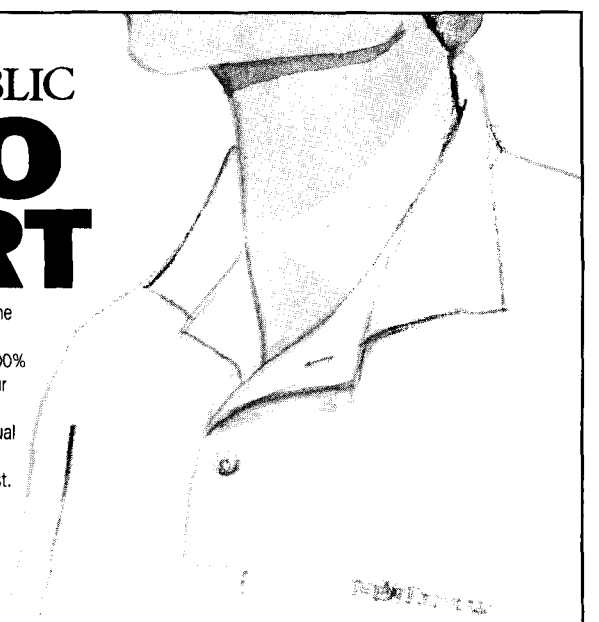

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camp is damned or deluded. Each cult holds in contempt the rituals and the laws of the other. Each thinks that it is itself the one hope for salvation.

Each of these cults corresponds to one of the two antagonists in the age of Reformation. In the realm of the Apple Macintosh, as in Catholic Europe, worshipers peer devoutly into screens filled with "icons." All is sound and imagery in Appledom. Even words look like decorative filigrees in exotic typefaces. The greatest icon of all, the inviolable Apple itself, stands in the dominating position at the upper-left corner of the screen. A central corporate headquarters decrees the form of all rites and practices. Infallible doctrine issues from one executive officer whose selection occurs in a sealed boardroom. Should anyone in his curia question his powers, the offender is excommunicated into outer darkness. The expelled heretic founds a new company, mutters obscurely of the coming age and the next computer, then disappears into silence, taking his stockholders with him. The mother company forbids financial competition as sternly as it stifles ideological competition; if you want to use computer programs that conform to Apple's orthodoxy, you must buy a computer made and sold by Apple itself.

AS IN Protestant Europe, by contrast, where sects divided endlessly into smaller competing sects and no church dominated any other, all is different in the fragmented world of IBM. That realm is now a chaos of conflicting norms and standards that not even IBM can hope to control. You can buy a computer that works like an IBM machine but contains nothing made or sold by IBM itself. Renegades from IBM constantly set up rival firms and establish standards of their own. When IBM recently abandoned some of its original standards and decreed new ones, many of its rivals declared a puritan allegiance to IBM's original faith, and denounced the company as a divisive innovator. Still, the IBM world is united by its distrust of icons and imagery. IBM's screens are designed for language, not pictures. Graven images may be tolerated by the more luxurious cults, but the true IBM faith relies on the austerity of the word.

A religion gives fanatics something to be fanatical about, but it also sustains and codifies the moral principles by which fanaticism might be judged. A computer encourages fanatics and does nothing to restrain them. Religious historians will have no trouble identifying the varieties of computer fanaticism. At one end of the scale is the ascetic stylite, who renounces the disorder of humanity to stare raptly at the screen. At the other end is the technological visionary, who rants endlessly about the utopia that will be ours when the computer comes into its kingdom.

Technological visionaries devise gleaming prisons that they imagine as the ideal society, and they cannot be shaken from the delusion that everyone will want to live there. The leading example of an earlier generation of visionaries was Buckminster Fuller, who never stopped talking about dymaxion houses and geodesic domes. Fuller's successor is Ted Nelson, whose 1974 *Computer Lib/Dream Machines*—two books bound back to back—has just been reissued by Tempus (a branch of Microsoft Press) with merciful cuts by the author, and a blurb by Timothy Leary. Nelson never stops talking about "hypertext," which is a way of storing information in a computer so that you can jump from one item to any other item remotely associated with it, until you reach a state of total befuddlement. Hypertext is designed for people whose attention span is no wider than a computer screen. If you want to move instantly from an economic analysis of diamond mines to a picture of a baseball diamond to a recording of "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend," hypertext is for you. Nelson is convinced that his plan to convert all human knowledge into hypertext has been blocked only by narrow-minded bureaucrats and other unidentified spoilsports, and he devotes many pages of his new edition to the conundrum that if Ted Nelson is so smart, why isn't he rich?

Technological visionaries can never recognize the distinction between the feasible and the desirable. If a machine can be made to perform some dazzlingly complicated task, then the visionary assumes that the task is worth performing. The moral silliness of computer visionaries is a benign version of the moral stupidity that drives nuclear engineers to invent bigger and better bombs.

IN Michael Heim's *Electric Language*, the first philosophical study of word processing, all these issues are either fumbled or ignored. The fault probably isn't the author's. His project was doomed from the start for two reasons: the book was written on a word processor, and it is a work of academic philosophy. A workman is no better than his tools, and the tools of philosophy and the computer prove hopelessly unequal to Heim's task. Heim never seems to notice that anything is wrong, but that is because he denies himself the use of any instruments except those that conceal the problem.

Heim's argument, when detached from all his philosophical throat-clearing, is simple. Books used to be created by authors who contemplated their ideas in private. This was a good thing. Computers replace the contemplation of ideas with an automated manipulation of words, while those words are linked to all other words through electronic networks. This is a bad thing. Yet its badness is mitigated by the fact that Heim finds computers fun to play with. They beep at him amusingly, and "it is nearly impossible to avoid some amount of fooling around with the power of programmed, automatic writing."

LIKE MOST recent work in academic philosophy, *Electric Language* takes far more interest in itself and in philosophy than in its ostensible subject. Heim never misses a chance to remind us that he is writing on a computer—in fact, on two computers. (He took one of them to the Acropolis so that the opening words of the book could report that those words were written on the Acropolis.) His introduction philosophizes about the problem of introduction. His first chapter talks about first principles. Almost half the book summarizes earlier philosophy by Heidegger, and by the author of Heim's dust jacket blurb, W. J. Ong, on changes in the nature of writing.

Heim's style turns poignant when he contemplates the solitary splendor of philosophy. "To seek to make connections fully explicit and coherent is the fate of philosophy, making it stand alone and apart," he writes. This sentence is typical of Heim's style. The word "fate" is misplaced—it belongs in the phrase about philosophy's aloneness—and seems to be a euphemism for pretension or vanity. Besides, Heim's argument keeps contradicting itself. The utopian clichés of the early chapters (including an inevitable page about hypertext) are refuted by the later chapters' reports of research studies on the effects of computers.

Heim swallows the visionaries' guff as if it were ambrosia, and imagines that computers can create a new "collaborative interaction" and a "gradually emerging sense of a new kind of community." Three chapters later he reports that com-

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puterized message systems instead foster a "confrontational style" of insult and aggression. On one page he affirms that, whether we like it or not, "we are approaching the paperless society." On the next page he reports that one effect of the computer is that "far more pages are produced as the ancillary function of corporations and government agencies than by all the traditional book, magazine, and newspaper publishers combined." Reviewing his achievement at the end of the book, he writes: "Our speculation has striven for consistency."

When Heim writes about the effects of computers on writing, he alternates between wide-eyed exultation at the ease with which he can move sentences around and thin-lipped warnings against the division of the written word from the contemplating mind. Early in the book he quotes some writers' anecdotal descriptions of word processing but dismisses these anecdotes as unworthy of philosophy. By the middle of the book he starts reeling off very similar anecdotes of his own. Philosophers' anecdotes are evidently more telling than other people's; and no matter how foolish or irrelevant the answers Heim gets from philosophers, he keeps coming back for more.

Heim insists on obscuring even his better points in a syntactical fog. For all his concern about metaphor, he is deaf to the metaphors in his own prose. He uses the phrase "digital writing" as if writing at a computer meant writing in binary digits, or as if writers had not been writing with their digits—their fingers—from the start. Heim describes the act of shuffling paragraphs around a computer screen as "restructuring" one's prose, a word that suggests a very dim notion of what prose structure means. His sense of history is dimmer still. He devotes a chapter to the invention of printing and its consequences without mentioning the Reformation. He summarizes the history of Western music as a decline from "sacred chant . . . to classical objective complexity to . . . the jingle and the hit song." If music used to be so dignified, one wonders what Shakespeare was joking about when one of his clowns claimed to have "a reasonable ear in music" and called for the tongs and the bones.

Heim recognizes that the speed and the ease of the computer leads to increased pressure to produce—pressure from the office worker's boss, pressure from the writer's superego. He introduces his alternative in grand style: "Our concrete proposals for influencing self-transformation at the interface are guided by the broad paradigm of contemplative concentration as found in the discipline called meditation." This means that when you work at a computer, it's a good idea to stop and think every now and then. Heim doesn't say how this solution will help the office worker whose keystrokes are monitored by the central computer in the personnel office, and who will be fired if the keystrokes-per-hour figure doesn't match the corporate quota.

The most disconcerting sentences in *Electric Language* were written by the German historian and theologian John Trithemius early in the 16th century, when the printing press, like the personal computer today, was both new and everywhere. Trithemius was certain that the printed book made learning effortless and therefore superficial. To approach the deepest meaning of a book, he wrote, one must copy it laboriously by hand, as scribes do: "Every word we write is imprinted more forcefully on our minds since we have to take our time while writing and reading." Heim doesn't notice that Trithemius on printing is an updated version of Plato on writing. Plato was certain that we understand the words we hear more fully than the words we read. But Heim suspects that Trithemius may have known what he was talking about. As he hurtles through the hyperspace of his word-processed prose, Heim pauses in baffled tribute to this defender of the written word and the human hand.

EDWARD MENDELSON

Edward Mendelson is professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia University and a contributing editor of *PC Magazine*.

TO CATCH A THIEF

Chatterton
by Peter Ackroyd

(Grove Press, 234 pp., $17.95)

The characters in Peter Ackroyd's ingenious new novel *Chatterton* aren't merely anxious about influence. They're haunted by it. Old words and images sap their substance. Dead poets steal from the living as quickly as the living steal from the lofty dead. In Ackroyd's comic but scary version of modernism, imitation is not a form of compliment, but the basic condition of what, for want of a better word, we call life. Parody, plagiarism, forgery, and outright theft are the best we moderns can do to convince ourselves that we're more alive than the ghosts we imitate.

Ackroyd's readers may feel the anxiety of missing an influence or two, or of mistaking the fictionalized real for the really fictitious. The book is a mine field of allusions, illusions, and inside jokes. Here, by way of a short course, are a few of the players you will want to keep in mind. I begin with Thomas Chatterton (1752-70), the Bristol boy who invented a medieval monk named Rowley to be the author of his (that is, Chatterton's) own forged poems. The forgeries were second-rate pastiche, but they were a first-rate marketing gimmick, and they made Chatterton briefly famous in an age that hungered for the sublimities of a picturesque past. His early death in a lonely garret secured his fame in a succeeding age.

I jump now to Peter Ackroyd (b. 1949), novelist, poet, biographer, critic—he's a former literary editor of the *Spectator* and currently chief book reviewer for the *Times* of London—who published his life of T. S. Eliot in 1984. According to Eliot (1888-1965):

> The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.

In his biographer's new novel, the idea is weirdly literalized. The history in the bones becomes a blood clot in a poet's brain; the individual talent is no match

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for ghastly tradition when "the intersection of the timeless moment / Is England and nowhere."

Oscar Wilde was the narrator of Ackroyd's earlier novel, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1983). In it a rascally character called Frank Harris accuses Wilde, "You have stolen lines from other writers." Wilde replies, "I did not steal them. I rescued them." Wilde's reply echoes what a historical Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) told the parodist Max Beerbohm, that plagiarism "is the privilege of the appreciative man. I never read Flaubert's *Tentation de St. Antoine* without signing my name at the end of it. *Que voulez-vous?* All the Best Hundred Books bear my signature in this manner." Wilde does not appear in Ackroyd's *Chatterton*, but his plots do. As in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a painted portrait usurps upon life; and as in Wilde's jollier version of that story, "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," a forgery invents an effectively real person.

IN *CHATTERTON*, life is repeatedly overshadowed by shady art. An unpublished poet named Charles Wychwood relives the painful death of Chatterton, haunted by a ghost who may be real and by artworks that may be fraudulent. Charles occasionally acts as amanuensis to Harriet Scrope, a novelist who is said to have gotten her start in fiction by plagiarizing the plot of a 19th-century novel called (like Ackroyd's earlier novel) *The Last Testament*; it was "about a poet who believed himself to be possessed by the spirits of dead writers but who, nevertheless, had been acclaimed as the most original poet of his age."

George Meredith (1828-1909)—for readers who are still following this cast list—wrote about his unhappy marriage in a sequence of 50 sonnets called "Modern Love." Mrs. Meredith left her husband for the painter Henry Wallis (1830-1916). Wallis used George Meredith as his model in a painting (now at the Tate Gallery) called *The Death of Chatterton*. The story of Meredith modeling the dead Chatterton is told in Ackroyd's novel *Chatterton*. Which brings me to William Wordsworth (1770-1850), who took Chatterton's death by self-administered arsenic as evidence that "We Poets in our youth begin in gladness, / But thereof come in the end despondency and madness." Wordsworth reimagined Chatterton as the "marvelous Boy" of Romantic myth, neither con man nor careerist but the avatar of true and lonely genius. It's one version of Chatterton among several that inhabit Ackroyd's satiric meditation on copies and originals, frauds and firstlings, deadly and living art.

I'VE TRIED to lay this out in a more or less chronological fashion. It is not, of course, the novel's fashion. The juxtapositions of narrative times are fairly clearly signaled, however, from the modern story of the struggling poet Charles Wychwood, who acquires what he takes to be a portrait of an undead middle-aged Chatterton, to the 19th-century narrative in which the Meredithes' marriage dies while Meredith is being immortalized as the (painted) dead Chatterton, to the 18th-century narrative of Chatterton's real life and death and spurious but active afterlife.

But the reader still has to stay nimble to figure out who says what when. Everyone speaks in quotation, sometimes of lines they haven't yet read. The young Chatterton, finding scraps of old writing in a church in Bristol, decides "to shore up these ancient fragments with my own genius." Allusions forge unwritten books: Charles acquires his Chatterton portrait in trade for his rare volumes of James Macpherson's *The Lost Art of Eighteenth-Century Flute-Playing*, a spurious title by the real author of the poems of the phony Ossian. Quotations yield puns that become parodies. To pick a single illustrative raisin from Ackroyd's rich pudding, there is the moment when Charles's "unruly son" calls down on his father the epithet "busy old fool."

Ackroyd's playfulness is funny, excessive, annoying, claustrophobic, finally frightening. But that, I take it, is his point. The characters in *Chatterton* do not own their own words, do not control their own being. "Thus do we see in every Line an Echoe," says Chatterton, "for the truest Plagiarism is the truest Poetry." He is echoing a line by Shakespeare, that notable plagiarist, who wrote that the truest poetry is the most feigning; but the echo is redoubled by the voices of Wilde, Eliot, and Peter Ackroyd. The novel inhabits a darker cave than Plato's; the shadows on the wall are the shadows of other shadows, and outside is not the sun but the representation of a sun, another fiction of the real.

Romantics like Wordsworth tried to believe in the lonely originality of true genius. The fate of Chatterton, "the sleepless Soul that perished in his pride," was Wordsworth's proof that "by our own spirits are we deified." Ackroyd writes later in the day, and the spirits that deify or damn his characters are precisely not their own. Ackroyd's postmodern Chatterton is the archetypal artist not by virtue of any imputed originality but because of the brazen frankness of his forgery.

Chatterton's most optimistic moment comes when Wychwood discovers a memoir that confirms the portrait's evidence: Chatterton did not die young. He forged his own death, and lived on to forge "the *newly discovered Works* of Mr. Gray, Mr. Akenside, Mr. Churchill, Mr. Collins, and sundry others: I even coppied Mr. Blake, for my own love of his Gothick style, but this was for Foolery only." The discovery proves that Chatterton was neither plagiarist nor forger but "the greatest poet in history!" The optimism, like Wychwood himself, is short-lived. Chatterton's forged death was itself a hoax perpetrated by a bookseller; and Blake himself was the copyist of Blake's "Gothick style."

QUESTIONS of reality or realism get little purchase in Ackroyd's world of slippery words. It's useless to complain, therefore, that even his modern characters are unconvincing as imitations of plausible people. But neither are they signifiers freely playing in a world redeemed from the illusion of positivistic meaning. They are instead bundles of literary mannerisms seeking to compose themselves into symbols and archetypes. Wychwood, the poet who discovers the inauthentic Chatterton forgeries, has an odd habit: at moments of great excitement, "He could not resist eating books." His friend Philip Slack, a librarian, tries at one point to stop Charles from eating pages of *Great Expectations*: "It's bad for you," Philip tells him. Andrew Flint, a friend from college days who is now writing a biography of Meredith, speaks largely in Latin tag phrases. Another character has a vocabulary drawn entirely from novelistic representations of the English public school.

Harriet Scrope, the foul-mouthed old novelist and plagiarist, is the evil spirit of Ackroyd's unreal city of modern London. She's Chatterton redivivus, in drag and in bad faith. Harriet draws some of her compelling awfulness from the world of Jessie Weston and Sir James Frazer, and some from the Christmas pantomime. She sips Bacchic quantities of gin from a teaspoon, refers to herself as "Mother," has a cat called Mr. Gaskell, amuses herself by speaking cockney, and spends part of the day thinking

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about a blind man led by a boy. Blocked in her efforts to write her own memoirs, she swindles the Chatterton relics from Charles's widow, Vivien (who shares her name with the first Mrs. Eliot). Vivien works in an art gallery run by a pair of homosexual, or hermaphroditic, grotesques; they sell what amount to authentic forgeries of modern masterpieces. The reader recognizes in such characters the ghosts of characters past, some of them specifically Dickensian. Their words seem determined to mean as well as be. Yet the echoes never quite add up to the allegory they portend, since allegory would imply a world beyond its own symbolizing, a world not created by language.

Ackroyd's 18th- and 19th-century characters fare slightly better in terms of conventional novelistic realism. Chatterton is no marvel, only an ambitious provincial who embarks on his career as forger partly for gain and partly to get closer to the spirit of his own dead father. And there is nothing romantic about his painful death from an accidental overdose of a quack cure for the pox. Of all Ackroyd's literary ghosts, George and Mary Ellen Meredith come closest to resembling what we take to be the characters of real life. But they too must serve as mouthpieces for hectic conundrums about the relation of the real to the imaginary, of original to model. Mrs. Meredith, for instance, complains that her husband "is always *pasticcio*." "You think me unnatural, my dear?" Meredith asks her. "I find you more natural on paper," she replies.

Chatterton is a belated and parodic version of the late-19th-century doppelgänger tale, merged with its Jamesian relative, the "lesson of the master" tale. In his previous novel, *Hawksmoor*, Ackroyd played out the past's haunting of the present in more deadly earnest. In 18th-century London, a satanic architect named Nicholas Dyer builds churches to the Antichrist of irrationalism and dedicates them in the blood of murdered innocents; in 20th-century London a detective named Hawksmoor investigates a series of senseless murders. The trail of detection leads Hawksmoor down the centuries to Dyer, to an evil deeply buried and freshly potent.

Hawksmoor is a brilliant, harrowing novel. Its modernist self-consciousness never stops it from delivering the authentic pleasures of the form it also parodies, including the sense of what Freud, in his analysis of the doppelgänger tale, called the *unheimlich*, the uncanny. In *Chatterton*, the uncanny sense of repetition-in-newness becomes a wildly inventive series of literary allusions. *Chatterton*'s wit is as wan and dizzily self-aware as the modern art world it wickedly mocks.

LAWRENCE DANSON

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TRB, *from page 4*

tors discovered a memo in Oliver North's files at the end of November 1986. Were it otherwise, his delay of investigations into *contra* funding during previous months would be damning instead of merely inexplicable.

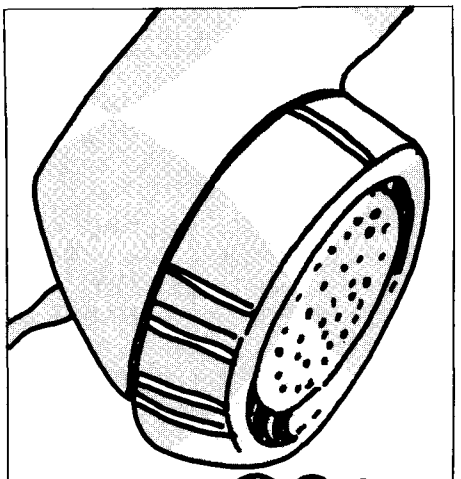
But the attorney general has sailed the good ship Ignorance through many a storm before these two, most notably in connection with recurring controversies over his own personal finances. In 1982, for example, Meese was having great trouble selling his house in California. The trouble was magically lifted off his back in an enormously complex operation involving below-market mortgages and forgiven loans, all of which was "totally separated from any knowledge on my part," as Meese testified to Congress. Ignorance saved him from indictment on this and related matters two special prosecutors ago.

Some of the Reagan administration's self-proclaimed ignoramuses may be lying, of course. But who can doubt that substantial genuine ignorance was a factor when the administration was simultaneously selling arms to one side in the Iran-Iraq war and pushing a project to help the other side finance its own arms purchases? Ignorance may be a good way to stay out of jail, but it's not a very good way to run a government.

CORRESPONDENCE, *from page 6*

funds to care for them. I doubt that it was ever the intention of American taxpayers to provide a lifetime health care and disability policy to everyone who merely wore a uniform, but this is what Congress has done.

JAMES O. MORSE, M.D.
Belton, Texas



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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Take Two Aspirin

I'M A LITTLE YOUNG to be worried about myocardial infarctions or atherosclerosis, but my heart grew just a bit lighter when I learned about the nifty side effects of aspirin. Raised in a family of doctors, I was taught that every ailment has its antidote in pill form. My father, returning from a long day of caring for the truly ill, administered family medicine in the following way:

ME: Dad, I feel terrible.

FATHER: Try these little green pills.

ME: Maybe you should take my temperature to see if I have a fever.

FATHER: Hmm, good idea.... You don't feel hot. Try these little pink pills.

Pill-taking and ailment-monitoring thus came naturally. Later, unable to stand the sight of blood, I gave up on medicine and became a hypochondriac. I was never one of those cranks, you understand. Oh, occasionally I'd interrupt perfectly pleasant conversations to strap on a blood pressure cuff. Or, periodically, say every 15 minutes, I'd grope at the nodes in my neck to determine whether I was sick yet. Sometimes I felt compelled to verify my quasi-medical skills and I'd test the reflexes of my sleeping younger brother with one of those little metal hammers. (I didn't go as far as Surgeon General Koop, who according to the *Washington Post* used to perform surgery on his neighbor's dogs.) These days I stick to pill-popping. I already down two to six aspirin tablets each morning. Even though I worry about cyanide poisoning from tampered containers, I'll probably up my dosage.

HYPOCHONDRIACS FEAR death excessively, but at least we're prepared for the worst. These days most people simply refuse to age or die gracefully. The slippery slope starts with hair dyes and transplants, breast implants and tooth caps, leading easily into wonder drugs like Retin-A, the new miracle wrinkle remover, or Mevacor, the new miracle cholesterol reducer. Soon it's tummy tucks and face-lifts and liposuction treatments and blood transfusions. A logical yet absurd extension of this Shangri-laian obsession is cryonics. For a mere $125,000 cryonicists will freeze your body at death until that indeterminate future when scientists can successfully bring it back to life. (The cost is only $50,000 if they freeze just your head.) Immortality, the final frontier. "What is wrong with living forever?" demands Jackson Zinn, president of the American Cryonics Society, in a recent *Washington Post Magazine* article. Actually, I'm not sure living forever would be such a good idea. Think of the parking problems. Want the key to eternal life? Take 250 aspirin and call me in the morning.

"TO THE LEFT IS *Black Place III*, an abstracted landscape that speaks to us of both outer and inner turmoil. The dark, looming hills and the lightning-slash sky seem to merge, and the composition seethes, as if the elements of nature were in combat or tearing apart." That's J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery, speaking on the pretaped walking tour about a painting in the Georgia O'Keeffe exhibit. Never mind that I think less of O'Keeffe's artistic merits and the overhyped show (which begins to tour the country next month) than Brown does. The bombast of Brown's commentary cannot be fully understood unless it's heard in a roomful of headphone-toting Sunday museum-goers, most of whom nod sagely to each breathy observation about O'Keeffe's "awesome monumentality," or her "almost molten anticipation of sunrise." What a pill. Brown's spiel is filled with such a cascade of references to the greatness of the work before us that it made me think he was selling something. And, of course, he is, though it's not art per se. More like the respectability of having the right opinions. Georgia O'Keeffe's painless, unchallenging work is the perfect vehicle. Of course, I have my own snobbism to blame for hearing the tape. Cultural piety compelled me to buy one too before I realized that it actually interfered with my appreciation of the paintings. From now on, I'll walk alone. The point of mass retrospectives like the O'Keeffe is not to produce experts, but to introduce people to the sensibility and development of an artist. Who needs to be told that O'Keeffe "found equal, limitless potential in a flower, a rock, a bone, or the entire sky"?

BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY has always been something of a hobby for Woody Allen. I just hope he doesn't make it a habit. It has never really bothered me that Allen varied his oeuvre by tossing off a laugh-free drama from time to time. After all, with the next Woody Allen film always a mere 12 months away, who could blame him for indulging his dramatic license? This past year, though, the Woodman's gone on a seriousness offensive. In addition to disappointing die-hards with *September*, he testified before Congress about the evils of colorization, and became a father for the first time. Granted, none of these acts is intrinsically bad, but taken together they were beginning to form a worrisome pattern. Now Allen's entered the public debate about Israel's brutal actions on the West Bank. In a recent *New York Times* op-ed article, he attempted to denounce Israel's policies, but instead trivialized his remarks with nervous humor. "If anything, I'm an uninformed coward," he protests at the outset, like the self-deprecating hero of *Annie Hall*. "I mean, fellas, are you kidding?" he huffs, as if in self-parody, on the subject of the beatings. "My goodness! Are these the people whose money I used to steal from those blue-and-white cans after collecting funds for a Jewish homeland?" Few subjects remain beyond the ken of a clever satirist. The hemorrhaging of Israel is probably one.

MOST PEOPLE think Richard Gephardt has become the man to beat among the Democrats because of his demagogic ability to find the right issues in Iowa. They assume it was these stratagems of political opportunism—backflipping on raising taxes or freezing Social Security, advocating a yellow peril, I mean protectionist trade policy—that persuade voters that Gephardt is suited for the presidency. Now the *New York Times* has revealed that all this availed him nothing. The secret to his success is his deft use of an eyebrow pencil, which counters his washed-out appearance on TV—the political equivalent of Retin-A. It's a pity the campaign managers can't manage cryonics. In 50 years even Gary Hart could make a comeback.

A. Z. P.

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A municipal financing story a five-year-old could understand.

Or a two-year-old. Or a child of any age. As long as they don't have to stop running and climbing and scraping their knees in their parks and playgrounds. Because of something as incomprehensible to a child as liability insurance. For a variety of reasons, among them an increase in lawsuits, municipal liability insurance has become a serious problem in California. Some cities face increases of up to 9000%. Others can't buy the insurance at any price.

Up until a year ago, it looked very much as if the playgrounds in a number of California communities would be a casualty of this insurance crisis. The problem was so serious, they were threatened to be closed.

But with Drexel Burnham lead managing three bond issues that provide self-funding liability programs, 34 counties, 23 cities and 22 school districts were able to get the insurance they needed. All three issues were sold as non-rated pooled certificates of participation. And don't think this was a temporary measure. All the participants were provided with coverage for up to twenty years. Right into the next generation of kids.

This was a transaction that worked out well for the municipal leaders, and the investors, of course. But really, it was the children who came out best in the deal. People who know how profitable municipal financing can be without even knowing how to pronounce it.

Drexel Burnham
Helping People Manage Change

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